# THE FIELDS OF FRANCE

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THE
FIELDS of FRANCE

# THE FIELDS OF FRANCE

BY

MADAME

## MARY DUCLAUX

(A. MARY F. ROBINSON)

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF RENAN" "COLLECTED POEMS" "THE RETURN TO NATURE" ETC. ETC.

WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR BY

W. B. MACDOUGALL

LONDON · CHAPMAN & HALL · LTD · 1905

LOCHES

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To

MY DEAR

MOTHER

LIKE ME, A LOVER OF

THE FIELDS OF FRANCE

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A FARM IN THE CANTAL

# A FARM IN THE CANTAL

(HAUTE-AUVERGNE)

1902

## I

THE farm lies in a wonderful country.

Every landscape has a basis of geology: in order to seize the features of the Cantal, you should stand, if possible, on the pointed crest of the Puy Mary. Before you, where once yawned a crater, rises an ash-grey cone of clinkstone: the Puy de Griou, a perfect sugarloaf. Here was the centre of volcanic force; and from this pile of long-dead lava some twelve or fifteen deep valleys radiate like the beams of a star. Down every valley runs a river. The rocky fissures of these river-beds separate, by a series of wooded gorges, the group of hills that mark the crater's rim; and these, on their further flank, roll down towards the plain in immense wavy plateaux, attaining at their highest point an altitude of some 6000 feet. These rolling pastures on the mountain-tops are the wealth of our country and the condition of our agriculture. I have never climbed higher than the long cliff behind our house, which bounds on the south the lovely valley of the Cère; even that is an ascent of some thousand feet. Green at its base with pastures, our hillside is crowned

with a cornice of fluted rocks, andesite and basalt, which tower above the serried beech woods, mantled on its breast. When at last you reach Les Huttes (the first village on the plateau), you see that our valley—wide, romantic, irregular as it appears—is, none the less, a sort of cañon or ravine sunk between two high table-lands, whose basalt floor is covered with pasture and dotted here and there with odd little huts or cabins, which in fact are cheese-farms; for the people of the valleys send their herds to pasture on the mountain-tops from May till after Michaelmas. This plateau is not flat; it rolls and undulates like the sea, and any of its higher points affords a marvellous view. To the north, the Puy de Griou rises sheer, as fine and as sharp as the Fusiyama in a Japanese print. The long-backed ridges of the Plomb du Cantal and Puy Mary, each with its double hump, crouch beside it, like great dragons, with lean, grey, ravined flanks, while the endless blue of the rolling plains stretches in the distance.

The Plomb is an old friend; with the black peaks of the Lioran, it closes our horizon in the valley, as you look to the north-east. Although the highest of our mountains (1858 metres)—and quite a respectable summit, for it is eight metres higher than the Righi—yet the Plomb is less effective than the frail ash-grey peak of Griou (1694 metres). From Olmet, these bound our view to the right. In front of us rises the long saddle-shaped back of the Courpou-Sauvage, strewn with rocks which simulate fantastic ruins. Out of sight, but close at hand, are Peyre-Arse, L'Usclade, Peyroux, Bataillouze, Puy Violent, Chavaroche, le Roc des Ombres. Their names preserve the image of a terror long forgotten. The Wild Creature, with Burnt Rock and Rock Ruddy; their neighbour, the Scorched Mountain, together with Rock Warful, Mount Violent and the Rock of Shadows, all rest in peace these many thousand years; the woods

wave, the pasture flowers, the herds feed upon their rocky sides. Only the black stones, rolled smooth so long ago, fallen among our fields of flowering buckwheat; only these, and the veins of lava, which burst their veil of mountain-pink and heather, remain and tell of that enormous upheaval, still apparent, of an elder world.

It is astonishing with what personality an accustomed eye invests a mountain. We say: "The Lioran is darker than usual this morning," as we should say: "Emilia has a headache." And what a pleasure when, towards September, the Courpou-Sauvage begins to blush with the blossoming heather! No mountains have ever seemed to me so friendly as these. They are not very high above our valley, which is situate some 2000 feet above sea-level, so that we behold a scant two-thirds of their real height. But their forms are lovely in their infinite variety. Time cannot wither them, nor custom stale. Woods cling to them; cliffs and rocks jut from them in peak or turret; cascades and fountains and innumerable streams gush from their hearts of fire; pasture, fern or heather robe them higher than the girdle; only the peaks are bare and take a thousand colours in the changing lights.

The hills do not rise sheer from the bottom, as in Switzerland. Innumerable landslips have torn their sides which, at periods of great distance, have fallen away from the cliff, heaping the ground with vast swellings and ridges, in much romantic confusion. Even to-day, these landslips continue, and the aspect of the country is slowly but continually transformed. Covered with beechwood or heather near the heights, green with pasture lower down, these ledges and terraces lead the eye to the valley bottom, which itself is never flat, but cradle-shaped. And therein lies the small winding river of the Cère.

My husband's old house of Olmet stands on one such ledge, some way up the southern bank of the valley, with the farm at its feet. Farm and house no longer belong to each other, but they are still on cordial terms; which is as well, since from our hinder terrace our eye drops involuntarily on all the life and business of our neighbours. The farm has been recently rebuilt by its new owner, and is no longer the picturesque hovel we used alternately to admire and deplore. But our tiny mountain manor, or moorland cottage, still bears the stamp of three hundred years on its thick solid walls and tower. The roof is beautiful, very steep, as befits a land of six months' snow, and a soft ash-grey in colour, being covered with thick heart-shaped tiles of powdery mica-schist, which surmount with a pyramid either tiny solid turret: a balcony starts out from the tower, whence you could sling a stone into the bottom of the valley, for Olmet stands on a jutting rock, to the great advantage of our view. The house is stunted from the front, where the garden is on the level of the first floor; but, seen from below, there is about the place a look at once austere and peaceful, rustic and dignified, as befits this land of hay and lava, of mountain peak and cream.

Of the four wishes of Horace, three are in our possession. Alas! we have not the little wood, so necessary in a southern August; an orchard of gnarled apple trees is all that we can boast. But we have the modest country place, the fountain near the door, the garden of flowers and fruit. "*Quand on a vu l'enclos d'Olmet!*" cries Madame Langeac, at the farm below (as though Marly or Versailles could not compete with our little garden), yet it is merely a bare hilly field or orchard, running to hay, with a flower patch here and there; but loud with the murmur of the rippling water which sparkles from the rocks, and noble with the vast and

PUY MARY

My brother's old house of Olmet stands on one such ledge, some way up the southern bank of the valley, with the farm at its feet. Farm and house no longer belong to each other, but they are still on cordial terms, which is as well, since from our hinder terrace our eyes plunge inextinguishably into all the life and business of our neighbours. The farm has been recently rebuilt by its new owner, and is no longer the picturesque hovel we used alternately to admire and deplore. But our tiny mountain manor, or moorland cottage, still bears the stamp of three hundred years on its thick solid walls and tower. The roof is beautiful, very steep, as befits a land of six months' snow, and a soft ash-grey in colour, being covered with thick heart-shaped tiles of powdery mica-schist, which surmount with a pyramid rather like a toy turret: a balcony starts out from the tower, whence you could sling a stone into the bottom of the valley, for Olmet stands on a jutting rock, to the great advantage of its [illegible] house is stunted from the front, where the garden is on the level of the first floor; but, seen from below, there is about the place a look at once austere and peaceful, rustic and dignified, as befits this land of hay and lava, of mountain peak and cream.

Of the four wishes of [illegible] three are in our possession. Alas! we have not the [illegible] wood, so necessary in a southern August; an orchard of gnarled apple trees is all that we can boast. But we have the modest country place, the fountain near the door, the garden of flowers and fruit. "*Quand on a un Paradis à Vouet!*" cries Madame Langeac, at the farm below (as though Marly or Versailles could not compete with our little garden), yet it is merely a bare hilly field or orchard, running to hay, with a flower patch here and there, but loud with the murmur of the rippling water which [illegible] from the [illegible], and noble with the vast and

various beauty of the view. To the south rise the ravined foot-hills, clothed in woods, crowned with cornices and organ-pipes of rock, their green hummocks swelling and rising to the east, ever larger and ever higher, till they reach the black cone of the Lioran, to which the valley ascends in a series of rugged steps, narrowing as it goes. To the west, on the other hand, it opens like a fan. The precipitous walls of cliff soften into downs of limestone, which die in the rolling plain beyond Arpajon, where, thirteen miles away, one lovely hill, broken from the chain, and larger and more lovely than its fellows, rises soft and blue, shaped like the breast of Ceres. To the one hand, the scene is full of grandeur and melancholy; while the western landscape smiles, most tranquil and noble in its dreamy peace. The mountains cease there, but long leagues beyond, in the vaporous blue of the distance, the plain still heaves and swells as with the movement of a sea: such an ocean of calm and space in which to bathe and renew one's self from the troubles of the town!

## II

From early June to Michaelmas our valley and half our hills are deep in flowering hay, or busy with haymaking, or studded with haycocks. As a poet says, with whom I hope to acquaint my readers—

> "Noun! jusqu' ohuéi digun n'o pas enbentat res
> Coumo oquelo sentour des prats seguats de frès
> Que porfumo, l'estiou, l'Oubergno tout entièiro!"

No one has ever invented anything like the smell of the new-mown hayfields, which, in summer, perfumes the whole of Auvergne! Hay is our wealth, and—when it has suffered

a transmutation into cheese and cattle—our only export and exchange with the valleys below. It is in order that we may grow our hay all summer for the winter's needs, that our cattle are sent in troops to feed on the mountain-tops, leaving behind only the draught-oxen and the cows for milking. We need plenty of hay, for, in the stables during the five months of snow that follow All Saints, you may roughly calculate four cartloads of it to every cow. On the higher slopes, we cut it once in July and again in September; while June, August, Michaelmas, and early October are haymaking time for the water-meadows in the bottoms, which yield four crops a year.

So, the summer long, the hay is out on hill or valley, and at night the cattle pull through the narrow roads the primitive hay-wains—two mighty ladders set a tilt on a plank above two wheels. After the wains, the herds come tramping. I love to watch them, and pass an hour most evenings seated upon our garden wall—a low stone bench above the orchard, which drops on the other side some thirty feet to the rocky lane below. Here come the cows, a score at most (for half a hundred of the herd are on the mountain), beautiful kine of Salers, small and neatly made, of a bright deep-red colour all over, all alike, with thick curly coats and branching horns above their deer-like heads. They are herded by a tiny cow-boy of seven; a few black goats loiter in the rear. The finely toned bells tinkle faintly across the silence. The beasts low as they pass the open door of the huge two-storied barn, into which a cow and an ox, yoked together, are backing a great toppling wain of hay. Old Gaffer Langeac, the farmer's father, has come out to view the crop. He is five and eighty, and, being past work, he wears out all the week his long-treasured Sunday garments—a sleeved waistcoat of black cloth, the

full sleeves buttoned into a tight wristband, a white shirt of coarse hemp-linen, and dark trousers of thick homespun *rase* or frieze. His blue eyes, still bright, and his straggling white locks gleam under a huge soft sombrero of black felt. He is a fine old fellow—but is not this the very valley of green old age? An ancient goatherdess comes down the lane, twirling the distaff set with coarse grey hemp, as she follows her flock; and as she stops to pass the time of day with her neighbour, her youngest grandchild runs out to meet her from the red-gabled cottage by the village bakehouse. The cows low to the calves in the byre; the kid in the orchard springs to its mother; the brown long-tailed sheep follow the shepherd. One handsome haymaker leans against the wall and whispers soft nothings in the ear of Annotou, the blonde little maid at the farm. A scent of cabbage-soup and hot buckwheat comes up from the cottage kitchens. 'Tis the hour of rest and general home-coming, not greatly changed since Sappho of old used to watch it in her Ionian isle—

> Ἔσπερε, πάντα φέρεις ὅσα φαινόλις ἐσκέδασ' Αὐὼς,
> Φέρεις οἶν, φέρεις αἶγα, φέρεις ματέρι παῖδα.

There are empty places to-night at the vast table in Langeac's kitchen; for the *Vacher*, or chief cowherd and dairy-master, with two *bouviers*, or cowboys, and a little lad, the *pâtre* (whose business is to watch the cattle that pasture on the moor), are up on the mountain with some fifty cows, half as many young calves, a young bull or two, a score of swine to fatten on the buttermilk, and some dozen goats. At the end of May, one mild afternoon, the troop set out from the valley under the farmer's care and marched the whole night through, till the next day, in the morning, they reached the mountain farm, some thirty miles away.

Every farm in our valley has thus its *Sennenhütte*, sometimes quite near at hand, sometimes at a considerable distance. Langeac, the farmer, rode back on the morrow; but every fortnight he repeats the journey, to inspect his herds, and to count the increasing number of the cheeses. Often we meet him on the mountain roads; he sits astride a solid roan cob, a grey linen blouse on his shoulders; a sack half-filled swings on either side his saddle, in which he carries a store of black-bread, fresh cabbage, news and letters (with sometimes an old newspaper or so) to the exiles who, all summer long, see neither rose nor fruit, nor face of wife or child, on the great green pasture of the mountain-top.

While the herds are afar, we are busy in the valleys, where the recent advent of the railroad has little changed the ancestral mode of life. The farm grows almost all the necessaries of our table. Our soil is too poor for wheat, but rye and buckwheat flourish on the mountain-sides; whole slopes and ledges, too dry for hay, are a garden of tall, crisp, white flowers, where the buckwheat (*sarrazin*) waves through August until mid-September. A little before Michaelmas the flowers die, the seed turns gradually black, the stems coral-red; and then the farm-hands come and reap the harvest, bringing great sheets of linen, which they spread in the field, and thrash thereon the grain with high-dancing flails. Ground into meal, the buckwheat yields the staple of our diet; the *bourriol*—a large, thin, soft, round crumpet, which, eaten hot with butter, or cold with clotted cream, or a nugget of cheese, or dipped in new milk, is not to be despised. Every morning, the housewife's earliest care is to fill the pail of *bourriols* which stands in every kitchen; next she warms the milk until the cream clots and rises. Besides the buckwheat, we grow oats for the cattle and rye for bread and straw. The rye-bread, very black, at once sweet and

sour (which makes, to my thinking, the most delicious bread and butter in the world), is shaved into large thin slices in the two-handled porringers, or *écuelles*, "*pour tremper la soupe.*" Four times a day, and five at midsummer, the farm-hands gather in Madame Langeac's kitchen and take their bowl of cabbage-soup, where the bacon, potatoes, black bread and cabbage make a mess so thick that the spoon stands up in it; they eat also a crumpet of buckwheat, and a noggin of Cantal cheese; and often a dish of curds and whey, when a cheese is in progress; a sausage if the pig has been lately killed; a fry of mushrooms in September; a tart of wild-cherries in July; or carrots sliced and fried with snippets of bacon; sometimes a queer stew of potatoes and curds called *truffado;* or some other homely treat which, at mid-day, serves to mark the importance of dinner, always washed down with a glass of the strong bluish-red wine they call *Limousin*, brought from the neighbouring departments of the Lot and the Corrèze. Fine brawny men and buxom maids, who work hard and live long, are grown upon this sober fare. With their open expression, frank brown eyes, upturned noses, abundant hair and vigorous frames, the Auvergnats, so ridiculed in France ("ni hommes, ni femmes, tous Auvergnats," as Daumier's legend has it), would be, if but a shade or so less dirty, a wholly pleasant-looking race, obviously Celtic, kind, frank, genial, and free.

The Auvergnat has some of the characters of the Yorkshireman. He is jovial, independent, frank, and shrewd. No man is keener at a bargain, and neither Greek, Jew, nor Armenian ever got the better of him; yet he is not sordid, as, for instance, the peasants of Maupassant's Normandy are sordid. The broken old grandfather, long past work, is here surrounded with every care and attention; the doctor is sent for when he ails; medicine, wine, and broth

are his in plenty; those terrible stories of the old and useless who are left to starve, when they can no longer take their share in the work of the fields, could never have been told of the poorest among our uplands. Notwithstanding his overweening love of money, there is something simple, candid, and kind, which mellows the heart of the child of Auvergne. His *naïveté* is legendary, and forms the subject of a hundred stories and farces, ever since the days of the Queen of Navarre. I will give none of them here, being anxious in this little book to set down chiefly the things I have seen for myself, or which have come under my own knowledge. But here is an example in point. A cousin of my husband's, whose country place is about fifteen miles from Aurillac, prefers spending her winters in town, and has hired for this purpose the top floor of a friend's house. One December morning, the farmer of La Romiguière, her small estate, brought her in to town a cart-load of wood for fuel. As he was going upstairs he met an old gentleman in a smoking-cap and plaid dressing-gown—in point of fact, the landlord. A minute later the farmer was in my cousin's lobby, very red and flustered.

"I fear, madam, my manners have not been all they ought!"

"Your manners!" said my cousin, astounded.

"Yes, ma'am. On the stairs I met a foreign priest, and I just bowed. It comes over me that I ought to have fallen on my knees, and perhaps kissed his ring."

"A foreign priest!" cried my cousin, more and more bewildered.

"Yes, madam, with a gold thing round his head, most beautiful, and a gown all over checks—*uno raubo touto corrolado.* Certainly, I ought to have dropped on my knees!"

This *naïveté* does not exclude a shrewd and kindly

humour, which is, in fact, a sort of glorified good sense. One of the members of my husband's family was a nun in the Convent of Aurillac—a recluse—who was, however, permitted to spend a few weeks every summer at her mother's country place. One day she was walking there with the old lady, when they met the farmer driving his harrow.

"Good morning, farmer," says she. "Is that an ox or a cow?"

"It's a cow, madam."

"And how do you know the difference?"

The farmer hesitated an instant, and then, with an indescribable look of roguish respect, he answered the nun—

"By the horns, madam!"

I give the little dialogue in patois, in case my book should stray into the hands of a philologist.

"*Oquel es un biòu o uno baco, Bouriaïré?*"

"*Co's* (*oco es*), *uno baco.*"

"*Cossì lou counessès?*"

"*Ò los couornos, Modomo!*"

Another farmer of our acquaintance answered an amateur agriculturist (it was not I!), who advised him to irrigate a particularly arid hayfield, "I'll put the water-course, if you'll find the water!" (*Ièu forai lou truel se me fosès benì l'aigo.*)

These genial and kindly peasants live in farms roomy and solid, built of blocks of grey volcanic stone; the steep roof has several tiers of windows; one would suppose it from outside a comfortable home. But in name and in fact the attics are granaries, and all the household crowd together in one or two rooms on the ground-floor. A huge chimney, with a hospitable mantle, shelters a couple of comfortable salt-box settles, reserved for the old; one stands

on either side the cavernous hearth, where, winter or summer, smoulders the half-trunk of a tree; a tall grandfather's clock by the dresser, is bright with painted earthenware dishes and pewter tankards; the best bed, high as a catafalque, stands, warmly curtained, in the corner under the stairs; a linen cupboard of walnut or cherry-wood, a huge massive table of unstained oak, flanked by two benches, a straw-bottomed chair or so, a few rough stools: such is the furniture of a kitchen in our parts, seldom clean. Here all the cooking is done, and the eating; here the other day I saw, in a box-bed, like a ship's berth, built into the wall, a young mother and her baby one day old, perfectly happy, while the farm-hands lunched at the table, and the fowls strolled in and out; here the masters sleep, in sickness and health; here visitors are received and farm-hands paid—it is, as they say in Yorkshire, the house-place. With its one window, its floor of dark unsmoothed volcanic stone (swept every day, but rarely washed), with its ceiling hung with herbs and sausages and huge sides of bacon, it is a warm and homely refuge, but not, as a rule, a bright or a pleasant place.

Sometimes I think the beasts have the best of it. The barns here are as large as churches. Built against the side of the mountain, they have two entrances, each on the level of the ground: the higher story forms the barn, the lower the byre. I have sometimes counted as many as twenty windows, set some two metres apart, along one side of those huge stone structures. Here from mid-November till mid-May the cattle live under cover, chew the cud and see in memory, no doubt, the meadows hard by with their delicious grass and the aromatic pastures on the mountain-top. Here in February and March the calves are born. Nothing is quainter than to see their wild delight, their leaps, their bounds, their joy, their tearing races, their frantic gambols,

THE FARM AT OLMET

THE FARM AT OLMET

when, for the first time in their lives, they come forth into the green fields and balmy air of May.

The pigsties, airy, spacious, comfortable, form a long line near the farm. The swine, too, are kept close in winter, but in summer they roam all over the hillsides and munch the grass like sheep. The pigs here are, I think, the ugliest and perhaps the wittiest in the world—great long-backed, long-legged creatures, far larger than a sheep. They climb the rocky fells, scamper down the smooth sides of the combes, trot all night after the herds to the mountain farm in summer, are hardy, inquisitive, and sociable, beyond belief. With their coal-black heads and pink, naked bodies, my sister says they remind her of the famous *Dame au Masque.* But they have no shame of their ugliness, and, when they hear a friendly voice on the other side the hedge, come trooping down from the top of the field to pass the time of day, with all the ease and assurance of an honoured acquaintance. A natural humour enlivens their indecent countenance—for, in France, a *cochon* is always indecent, and Madame Langeac, when she speaks to her social superiors, seldom forgets to call the pigs "*les habillés de soie.*" (One day I asked her the destination of a cool, stone-floored room: "*Sauf votre respect, madame,*" she replied, "*elle sert pour saler les habillés de soie.*") Clad in silk or clad in bristles (the two words are the same in French), at least during their lifetime our wide-wandering mountain-swine have a good time of their own; and, though it is natural in humans to esteem them chiefly in their ulterior form of ham, I believe we should miss them from the landscape. We have a proverb in our parts which says of a pair of friends that they are "*Camarades comme cochons*"—or *sochons,* as we say in Auvergne. In vain, a learned professor of Clermont has sought to explain away the unseemly word

as a corruption of the Latin *socius*. Why should we say, "Camarades comme *socius?*" There's no meaning in it. Glance at the hills, my good Don, and see the friendly creatures ambling about, in pairs or little troops, knocking their heads together, grunting out their gossip or their confidences, complaining about that last dish at dinner, grazing and grunting over all the green volcanoes of Auvergne, and then you may hope to understand the people's wit.

But listen! What unearthly noise is that which rises at this very moment from the farm? No pigsticking, for we are in summer still. There goes Madame Langeac, followed by her two maids and a small boy; each of them holds high a copper saucepan, warming-pan, or kettle (serving as a cymbal), on which she clatters with a key or fork. The three dogs and old Gaffer Langeac look on and grin. Slowly in calm procession they move down the lane till they reach the old walnut-tree in the field beneath our wall. And now I see a sort of fruit on a bough of the tree, like a black hanging pear or melon. It is a swarm of bees. From field to field, its owners have followed it with this infernal symphony, which serves, as they suppose, to attract the bees, or in any case to advertise the owner of the land on which they settle, whose property they are. See, a woman brings the hive. To-morrow, the swarm will be busy in its straw-clad home on the sunny bench beneath the south-east wall. And the bees will take rank as friends. On feast-days the children will deck their hive with flowers or coloured ribbons; a bow of crape will be tied to it in times of mourning. So, deeming themselves beloved and associate, the bees will work and supply their masters with the sweet, dark honey of Auvergne, so pungently perfumed, so luscious and aromatic, filled with the scent of the heather and the savour of the sarrazin.

## III

Jean-Irénée, our gardener at the lodge, does little work for us save plant and tend the kitchen-garden, whose produce he shares, and mow the lawns and orchard—when he deems the grass long enough to feed his cows. He labours for us until noon; after midday he is on his own account a busy man, and a small farmer in his way, with four cows, a cart, and four tiny fields of his own well chosen, scattered in different folds and hollows of the mountain. We give him his house, an acre of grass or two, his garden, and stabling for his cows and pigs; in addition, he has something less than £20 of wages and *étrennes*, so that he is well off, for Olmet, where even a *bouvier-grand*, that important person and mainstay of a farm, the head-cowboy, earns barely £17 a year. His cows are tended (for here the cows are always watched and tended) by his stepdaughter Florentine, a child of eight years old. Florentine's childhood has been sad enough. Her father died before her birth, and, after her mother's second marriage, the successive birth of two little sisters soon left her out in the cold. She is happier now that she is some one in the household, with a place of her own, and worth her salt. There is nothing unusual in her position. Here the flocks and herds are always minded by tiny shepherds of from five to eleven, who herd the bull past frightened ladies with much air and grace. Alone on the mountain all day long with their charges, they gain an incomparable knowledge of animal nature, of the virtues of herbs and plants, the changes in the skies and winds, and such unwritten lore. The other day, a farmer's son, the head of a large dairy farm at Badailhac, told me that he had learned half he knew as he tended the cows on the

hillside in his childhood. "A gentleman," he said, "a *monsieur*, could never understand them. No, a dairyman must be taken young." But, during their unconscious education, the poor mites sometimes find time hang heavy on their hands. I know a little shepherd girl at Aris, demurely dressed in black; whenever I pass her she is seated beneath a tree, telling her beads, or reading in a book. But Florentine is barely eight. Her coal-black eyes and laughing gipsy face bespeak her of a more adventurous cast. She is even now in disgrace because, the other day, when Jean-Irénée went up the hill, he found her in a field with little Guiralou, the farmer's herd-boy, roasting, in the ashes of a mighty bonfire, a score of potatoes freshly torn from the field. Fortunately, the cows, compassionate to their little guardian, had continued to conduct themselves with propriety, despite her absence.

A greater calamity—a real one—happened last autumn, and then I thought that Florentine—such an anxious, sobered Florentine!—would never play the truant any more. She was not at fault, or I tremble to think of her punishment. Happily the day was a Sunday; Jean-Irénée himself was seated in the field beside the child, when suddenly the cow stepped on a rolling stone, fell down a precipitous bank, and broke her leg. It was a fine beast, in full milk, having weaned its first calf. Even at Olmet, such a beast is worth from twelve to fifteen pounds. I shall not forget the consternation of the man, the white despair of the child, as they came back that afternoon supporting the patient animal, whose russet foreankle dropped pending. The poor beastie munched cheerfully a handful of clover and a crust, and lay in the stable, in no great pain apparently, not ill-content.

But at Olmet we have not learned how to set a cow's leg. To make butcher's meat of poor Corrado, before any fever set in, was her master's only thought, and indeed his

duty. In vain he visited Vic and Polminhac, Thiézac and Carlat. At last an army butcher, from Aurillac, consented to buy the cow for a matter of sixty francs. The loss was heavy, and for many a day Jean-Irénée saw the sunshine black. It is to avert such dangers that, on our rocky hillsides, a tiny guardian is always sent with the cows. One of these little shepherds became (as we all know) so great a man of science that his contemporaries deemed him a sorcerer; he invented the pendulum (I think) in clockwork, and finally ascended the throne of St. Peter as Pope Sylvester II. Having shepherded lambs, the little *pâtre* of Aurillac knew how to shepherd nations. I know not that any other of our Cantal shepherds has shown the genius of a Gerbert (such was Sylvester's name), of a Giotto, a Burns, a Joan of Arc. But such a life, one would imagine, must predispose a thoughtful mind to reflection and observation.

Sometimes, as we come home at nightfall from our walk, I hear, high up in the bracken and the broom, a small keen voice singing shrilly, some large and doleful verse maybe of *lou Grondo* (*la Grande*), the endless patois chant our peasants sing; or perhaps a stanza of the *Marseillaise*. Some poor child up there is growing frightened in the dusk! Ours is a Celtic country, full of phantoms, elves, and fairies. Who knows but the huntsman with his spectral rout may dash out of yonder hollow? There is also, and especially, the Drac, a subtle spirit whose dear delight it is to play pranks at twilight on the little herds—a Proteus imp who can change into any shape, who plaits the cattle's tails and manes into inextricable mats, who pulled Touéno's ears only last November, one evening as he sat upon the hill, leaving the child half-dead with fear. Who but the Drac misleads the baby cowherds when they and their cattle take a wrong turning, when nights are dark? 'Twas he, most likely, who

placed the stone on which our Corrado slipped and broke her leg. It is scant comfort, so far afield and quite alone, to remember that he is no respecter of persons; or how, one chilly winter's night, he pulled the farmer's wife herself right out of bed. Nothing is sacred to the Drac! More cause for fear! Sing louder, little shepherd, and I'll join in, down here in the lane, to hearten up your courage!

## IV

Yesterday, we drove to the *buron* on the mountain. *Buron* is a local word, which we fondly believe to be derived from the Greek, a relic perhaps of antique settlers, in the south, near Marseilles; however this may be, it is not patois: in our dialect, we call the buron, *lou mosut*—"the little house." Has not Vermenouze sung the little red-tiled hut, on the summit of the mountain, "like a young cock, red and small, reared up there in his glory, in the middle of the blue sky."

"Lou mosut, coumo un golitchiou
Quilhat omoun, rougi e pitchiou,
Ol mièt dèl cieu blus, dins lo glorio."

However we may call it, a *buron* expresses a little lonely habitation on the mountain, almost a hut, where the neatherds sleep in summer, and where the cheese is made, day after day, from the end of May till mid-October. It is a long climb from Olmet to the plateau whereon these little cheese-farms multiply and prosper. The road, in steep zigzags, mounts the hill; we leave the pasture behind us, and the fields of flowering buckwheat, and even the high heathery ridge of the *Pas du Luc;* we enter the hanging beechwoods and crawl up the wall of the cliff, until lo! we emerge on a great sea of undulating pasture-land, apparently illimited,

save here and there by a grey mountain peak. The foreground is studded with tiny red-roofed *burons*, each shaded by its group of centenary limes.

"L'erbo * que pousso eici, pès puèts è sus plotèu
N'es pas coumo en obal, e pus rudo e pus sono,
E sent bon ; li troubai l'ourgulhouso cinsono,
Que despleguo soi flours jiaunos coumo un dropéu."

Do you understand?

"The grass that grows up here, on the puys and the plateau,
Is not like that below, it is rougher and more wholesome :
It smells good ; there you find the proud gentian
Who displays her yellow flowers like a banner."

It was after four when we at last reached the *buron*. The cows had come in from the moor to the fold. The milkmen had donned their blouses of grey hemp-linen, which hung in stiff hieratic folds. Each had, tied to his loins, a queer stumpy stool, like some odd sort of bustle. Now they call: "Frijado! Morgorido! Marquise!" Amid a silvery tinkle of cow-bells the beautiful red beasts approach. As each takes her stand, a cow-herd brings up to her a curly red calf. But the poor beastie has scarce pulled a throatful or so of its mother's milk (its mother or its foster-mother, for at the *buron* each calf has a mother and a nurse) when a strong arm pulls it away and holds it tightly until the pail is full, when it may resume its supper, while the cow caresses it with a loving maternal tongue. All round the fold the beasts are being milked, the calves are bleating or sucking, the herdsmen are busy. Only in the middle, impassible and haughty, sits the bull, with a look that seems to say: "All this has nothing to do with me. Let them settle it among themselves."

* "Flour de Brousso," par Arsène Vermenouze. [Imprimerie Moderne. Aurillac. 1896.]

Now the cattle will remain all night in the fold, unsheltered. Every morning three sides of the palisade are displaced, so that the cows never sleep twice in the same bed ; and in this primitive fashion, at the end of the summer, the whole pasture has been manured : it is called the *fumado.* After the milking time at dawn the cattle are set free, and all day long they pasture in the *aigado,* or marshy moor, where the gentian, the pink, the meadowsweet and larkspur grow among the rush and the broom, the bilberry and heather. Here the grass is scantier, but sweet and aromatic. To the quantity of wild thyme and savoury herbs in the *aigado,* the peasants attribute the wholesome flavour of the Cantal cheese.

A mountain farm often boasts in summer some three score to a hundred head of cattle, besides the pigs to fatten, and the goats, from whose milk is made a delicate little round cream-cheese, the *cabecou.* The herd is under the care of a responsible dairyman, aided by two or three *bouviers,* or cowboys, and at least one little cowherd. It is wonderful to see how mere a hut suffices to house them all. The cattle sleep in the open, save the youngest calves, who have a little byre all to themselves. The men sleep in a rough attic under the sloping roof of the hut, whose one downstair room serves to make the cheese. Cheese-making is the great trade of our parts, for here the cheese is the gentleman who pays the rent (*le fromage paie le fermagè*), say our farmers. Push open the door under the lime-trees. You enter a moderate-sized room which occupies the whole ground floor, paved with rough volcanic stone, dark grey, and slopped with whey. In one corner stands a primitive open fireplace, with a pan or two and a cauldron for the herdsmen's soup ; close to it are placed a rough table and a bench. The rest of the space is devoted to cheese-making,

THE CÈRE AT VIC

and is filled with narrow, man-high wooden measures, or *gerles*, each containing a hundred litres of milk or so, with cheese-moulds, and cheese-wrings, with tubs in which the whey ferments, producing at the end of three days a pale fat cream of which the herdsmen make their butter, and finally with the churn—the whole indescribably sordid and dirty. A tiny garden surrounds this primitive dwelling, and furnishes a few rough roots for the soup; turnips come well there; it is often too bleak and high for cabbage. But the wealth of the *buron* is stored in a cellar under the hill-top, opening to the north. There are laid, on a rough trellis of wood, the huge golden cheeses, each a hundred pounds in weight (fifty kilos). They look like so many full moons, laid under the earth to keep fresh till they are wanted in Heaven. . . . These cellars generally join the hut; but, as their coolness and depth is of vast importance, sometimes a cavern is hewn in a favourable spot on a solitary mountain side. Few things are more startling to the traveller unaccustomed to our parts than, while admiring the vast and melancholy landscape, so wild, so green, so unutterably lonely, to find himself suddenly assailed by an unmistakable stench of Cantal or Roquefort cheese.

Summer at the *buron* is without a change in its season from the blossoming of the limes till the flowering of the gentian. There rose and lily, strawberry and peach, green peas and melon, are words of a dead language. Day succeeds day, with the milking at dawn and the milking at even, the cheese-making of a morning, and, after the mid-day siesta (for the cowboys rise at three), the turning of the heavy cheeses in the cellar. The *vacher* on the mountain-top is as lonely and as frugal as the sailor on the sea. Few incidents mark the progress of the summer. In July the farmer comes and takes away the bulls; at the

end of August the yellow gentian has finished flowering, and the herdsmen make a brief but lucrative harvest of its plants. The days grow shorter, the nights cold and sharp, the pasture rarer on *fumado* and *aigado*. Yet, such is the sense of freedom, such the exhilaration of the mountain air, that never have I heard our herdsmen lament the length or dull remoteness of their *estivade*.

## V

Sometimes we hire a carriage and drive far and wide, with half a dozen huge flagoons under the driver's seat, in search of fountain-water for my husband to analyze. Last year, on one of these expeditions, he left me in the phaeton while he, with his great glass bottles, went down a hill to the springs of Badalhac. It was Sunday. The peasants of that cheerful mountain-eyrie were standing about, picturesque enough in their white shirts, with short black boleros or sleeved waistcoats, and large sombreros. (In autumn they add a voluminous mantle to this outfit.) One of them came up to the carriage, and, after a few words to the coachman, began to address me in patois. I caught the words "Proubençó, Piémont." "He says," explained the coachman, "that if you cannot speak our patois, he can understand you almost as well in the dialect of Provence or Piémont." Never have I felt so ignorant! Here were three modern languages, in none of which was I able to say good morning to a friendly fellow-traveller.

The Félibres came in time to give a new lease of life to the fast-decaying patois of Auvergne. Under their auspices there is published at Aurillac a local paper, *Lo Cobreto* (The Bagpipes); for the bagpipes, as befits a Celtic country, is our

national instrument, and we dance a stately sort of reel, more like a minuet, *la bourrée*. *Lo Cobreto*, of course, is written in patois, not by peasants, but, as in Provence, by middle-class men of letters who have made the dialect their hobby. If Mistral next summer should visit Aurillac as he proposes, they would give him a great banquet, as they did some years ago for Felix Gras; and the peasants and small shopkeepers would turn out to stare at and do homage to the Laureate of Languedoc. Our cousin Vermenouze would recite him an ode in patois, for Vermenouze is the local genius and *copiscol*, or chief of the school of Auvergne. Fancy Don Quixote turned poet and sportsman, pious and chivalrous as ever, with a cross stuck in his cravat, a blessed medal at his watch-chain, a gun in his hand, a fishing-rod under his arm, and a volume of Mistral or Virgil in his pocket. As like as not he has also a pipe in his mouth; and on his feet, perhaps, a pair of sabots.

"Jéu pouorte pas toutchiour, quond tourne de lo casso,
Lèbre, perdigal ou becasso,
Mès, se trobe plus res, pes puets ou pes trobèrs
Li culisse ou min fouorço bèrs,
O plenoi mos e per doutchino,
Deis bèrs de brousso que sentou lo soubotchino"

("I do not always bring home, when I return from shooting, a hare, a partridge, or a snipe. But if I find nothing else on the peaks and on the fells, at least I gather plenty of verses, by handfuls and by dozens; verses, made of heather, verses with a wilding scent")—no description could be better than the poet's own. Such is the *copiscol;* an old bachelor, devoted to family, kinsmen, country; no poet has sung less of love or more sincerely of home and Nature. The moors round St. Paul-des-Landes, where the wild duck and snipe troop by in March, where the partridge rustles in autumn,

and the startled hare bounds from the tussocked grass; the *buron* on the mountain, the life of the farm in the village, the great distant Puys on the horizon; such are the subjects of his muse. Last year, I grieved that such a poet should write for men who seldom read. But my little Auvergnate housemaid tells me that his poems are recited in the market-place at Aurillac on holiday afternoons. What poet could wish for more?

Our patois has a Spanish or a Gascon sound, rough but sonorous, pleasant to the ear, with numerous *o's* and rolling *ou's* and *aü's*. You pronounce the *v* almost like *b* (*Bit* for Vic, *bedel* for veau). *A* changes to *o*, as in *Contau*, Cantal; *Morgorido*, Marguerite. *O* changes to *ou*—*Obeiroun*, Aveyron; *Louzéro*, Lozère. French *au*, pronounced as ô, changes to *au*, pronounced as â-oo (*Nautres*, nous-aûtres; *Contau*, Cantal; *Naut-Miètchour*, Haut-midi), except when it changes to *ou*, pronounced *oo*, as in *Ourlhat*, Aurillac; *Oubergno*, Auvergne. Like all the idioms of France, the patois of our Highlands is a corruption of the Low Latin, or rustic Lingua Romana, spoken generally in Gaul at the time of the barbarian invasion and for some centuries after. Most of the frequent words of every day are still very close to their Romance origin: *Copt*, caput, head; *aigo*, aqua, water; *fau*, fagus, beech; *compono*, campana, church-bell; *semen*, semen, seed; *lün*, lumen, lamp; *camps*, campus, a field overgrown with heather, or a moor; *baco*, vacca, cow; *bedel*, vitellus, calf; *òussell*, ucellus, bird; *fromentau*, fromentalia, corn-land; *gal*, gallus, cock; *nèu*, neve, snow; *sor*, soror, a sister; *fenno*, femina, woman; *hibernar*, hibernare, and *estivar*, æstivare, spend the winter or pass the summer. Other later words and expressions are a vulgar corruption of the French: *tchiobal*, cheval; *bilatchi*, village; *biatchi*, voyage; *Toutchion* (All Saints), Toussaint. At once antique and popular, the

speech of our mountains is doubtless destined to disappear, but not without a struggle, and not, if our Félibres can help it, without having made its mark in literature.

> "Nautres que son lou Naut-Mietjiour,
> Contau, Obeiroun, o Louzèro,
> Porlons tobe lo lengo fiéro
> De los onticos Cours d'Omour."

"We others, of the High-South: Cantal, Aveyron, Lozère, we also speak the proud language of the antique Courts of Love," says Vermenouze, mindful that his dialect is a branch of that vast and ancient Langue d'Oc which includes the Provençal and the Catalan, so recently honoured and preserved by a Mistral and a Verdaguer.

## VI

Life and Nature are here my friends and great delight —the round of the harvests, the flowers in their courses, the ways of beast and bird; and I can say with the great emperor, "Everything is fruit to me which thy seasons bring, O Nature." From earliest June till mid-July or later, before the hay is cut, our fields are as full of flowers as any Paradise of Fra Angelico's. Nowhere have I seen plants so robust and brilliant, blossom of all sorts so abundant. In the water-meadows, the forget-me-not grows in high bright patches among the ox-eye daisies; the meadow-sweet is tall along the runnel's edge among the flowering mint and willowherb; the loose-strife springs crimson in the hollows; the columbine stands high and blue in every hedge; on the heights the fox-glove hangs its blood-red bells from every rock or bank; at the base of the beech-woods grows a smaller, more delicate sort, of a

faint lemon-yellow with glossy leaves, and the look of a hothouse plant. The hedges are smothered with wild roses all July, and with honeysuckle all the summer long; the banks are full of Ragged-Robin. Now the various campanulas appear—the thyrsis-campanula, with its dark, deep buds set close against an upright stem, one would say a bunch of violets tied to a staff; and paler Canterbury bells, swinging from every hedge-side, and harebell—our English Fare-thee-well Summer!—on all the moors. The bright rose-pink blooms of the mallow, larger and more abundant than elsewhere, flourish on the fallow fields. The moors, in June, are one field of cloth of gold when the broom is out in flower; later the scabious and the exquisite soft blue tufts of the mountain jasione dapple many a sunburned hillside with azure and fawn. The red and white silene, the yellow impatiens with its balsam-like blossoms, the wild geraniums, sedum of every sort and saxifrage, and all the Alpine epilobes, the pink saponaria, which looks like a large rose-coloured single phlox, with all kinds of woodruff, asperule, and lady's bed-straw, cover hill and field with a dazzling perfumed carpet. In the woods and hedges of Clavière the wine-coloured Japanese-looking Martagon lilies spring in companies, tall and slender. But the glory of our summers are the mountain pinks; sometimes small deep eyes of an intensest crimson, and sometimes large pale-patterned feathery picotees; they grow in beds about the lava-rocks and spring in thousands among the budding heather. On the higher mountains, at the Lioran for instance, and on our tablelands at Les Huttes, the gentian grows, beautiful deep-blue cups close set to the earth, or free-flowering yellow blossoms arranged in tiers round a tallish stalk. Here, too, may you find the anemone, larkspur, grass of parnassus, monk'shood, orchid, martagon lily, and a huge sort of Solomon's seal which branches like

a bracken. In every cranny of the loose stone walls abound the most delicate ferns. Every bank is bright with the wood-strawberry; the gooseberry grows in the hedge; the tall wild cherry, so frequent in Auvergne, drops its dark sweet fruit in your lap as you sit under the trees; but you must climb the woods to find the thick growing raspberry-canes, rose-red with fruit, and the myrtle-like bilberry close set with round blue berries. In autumn, on every moor and height, the heather comes out among the second blossom of the broom. Here is the place for mushrooms, for the large-domed *Chevalier* or *coucorlo*, spotted like the breast of a missel-thrush; among the beech-woods grow the huge delicious *cèpes*, grotesque in form and colour; on the higher pastures we find the pink-fleshed English sort, the best of all. We string them like beads on filaments of broom, knotted together, and tie them round our necks in chains and necklaces, in order to carry them safe home for dinner.

At last the blackberries shine in the hedges, the whortleberry on the hills. Now comes the last flower of all, the pale *veilleuse*, or lilac colchicum, springing in myriads in the aftermath and orchard-grass, although, on the heights, a few stunted scabious, wild pinks, and gentians may linger until Martinmas. Chill October is at hand. Already, a fortnight ago, one stormy afternoon, I watched the swallows gather in the clouds. The time of flowers is over.

To us, the beautiful blossoms are a mere delight. To the mountain shepherds, the gentian gathering is a fruitful, unsown harvest. In the first days of September, when the plants are out of flower, a great massacre of the innocents takes place upon the mountain-tops. The victim is the tall yellow gentian, much in request among druggists and manufacturers of liqueurs. Already, on the last day in August, we met an old mountain farmer, much elate. He

THE OLD HOUSE AT OLMET

a visit, we turn to other interests, such as fall [illegible] picturesque and archæological turn of [illegible]. Our lists are studded everywhere with ancient castles, mountain manors, and [illegible] houses, some of them very small, mere cottages, [illegible] than our tiny Olmet which does not boast a [illegible] all told. Such are

Cols, buried in woods under the toppling mountain-crags; and beautiful Trémoulet, perched on the peak of a rock suddenly reared in the wild gorge of the Cère. Others are solid feudal keeps, to which has been added, some two hundred years ago, a steep-roofed comfortable dwelling-house, with charming unsymmetrical windows, an air of open grace, and a complete indifference to the old fortress it has married. Comblat-le-Château is of this sort. Just opposite our windows, on the other side the valley, it stands amid its lawns and gardens, at the foot of the mountain, on a low mound, overlooking the road to Vic. Though seldom inhabited, it looks the most cheerful and habitable of our châteaux, of which the most picturesque (after Trémoulet) are Pestels and Vixouge. Pestels, alas! restored last year, but still magnificent, by virtue of the immense proportions of its six-storied battlemented keep, and its romantic position—Pestels is seated on a steep ledge or platform some way up the mountain, surrounded by precipices which, on three sides, drop to the valley, and, on the fourth, into a wooded ravine or glen. Vixouge stands halfway up the opposite hill, built on a knoll or holm, with the pastures falling gently from it. The walls and gateway are of the fourteenth century, the latter fortified by two small round towers. But now the gate stands open on a shady lane, opposite a circular stone fountain, with a drinking-trough for cattle. It leads to a dark abandoned garden, all overgrown, and a tall seventeenth-century manor, steep-roofed, with corbelled turrets at the corners, and a peculiar, inexpressible air of poetic melancholy. Just so must have looked the moated grange of Mariana. The owls must love to hoot here, and at night, no doubt, the ravens flap about the lonely house, which might have taken life from a dream of Robida or Gustave Doré. From the

manor-wall, the eye drops sheer to a glittering lozenge of water in the fields below—a reservoir, with beside it, half in ruins, a Louis Seize Chinese pagoda, the bathhouse of some eighteenth-century ancestress; its bright red dilapidated roof and damp-stained walls tell of a century's neglect. All round the mountains lie in heaps. Below Vixouge, right and left, stretches the Pas du Luc, a long-backed ridge of moor, where landslip after landslip has loosed the great blocks of andesitic breccia, which lie heaped up among the bracken and heather. It is a place to dream in, hour after hour.

Vic itself has its château—the Consular House of the Prince of Monaco, who was the old hereditary Consul of Vic-en-Carladés. Behind, the grey houses climb the hill, some of them fine old turreted structures standing in their orchards and walled gardens, ancient town residences of the local gentry, while others are the merest village shops, with wooden balconies and gabled roofs. They lead to the church, not unpicturesque, with a Romanesque choir. Above the mountain rises, clad in beech-woods, with great organ-flutings and overhanging blocks of reddish stone, any one of which, one would think, might fall at any moment and crush into nothingness the little town below.

## VIII

Michaelmas! This year the woods are still unchanged, although the frosts have turned to golden sequins the leaves of the aspens by the river. At twilight, Venus glitters in a frosty sky above the faded summits of the mountain. The wild cherries in the hedge are as pink in their foliage as the maples on a Japanese fan. The weather is of that

intense autumn blueness and brilliance which Madame de Sévigné once called "un temps d'or et de cristal." There is a sharp, pleasant quality in the air. Our walks on the mountain are longer and taken at a brisker pace, and so the other day we came upon the prettiest sight: a knoll upon the hillside crowned by a tall group of mountain thistles of more than a woman's stature; the fluff of the thistledown, the delicate tracery of the leaves profiled against the sunset sky. The sound of our steps aroused from the heart of it some thirty or forty tiny goldfinches who had been feeding there,—in that immense landscape they looked scarce larger than humming-birds, as they rose up, poising, quivering, fluttering, soaring, like a living fountain of golden downy wings.

The birds here are a great delight. The blackbird, the finches, the blackcap, the chaffinch, sing in all the fields. I seldom hear the lark, save on the sunny uplands, and never the nightingale; but the blackbird pipes his flute in every bush. The larger sort of birds especially love the mountain: the great buzzard with his brown eagle-wings and wailing melancholy cry, the crow, the rook, flocks of friendly magpies, and in every spinny the bright blue flash of the jay. How I love the jay! Its harsh gay laughter seems to me an integral part of spring—as much so as the sunny winds of March. No bird is so handsome. I have a friendship for its fierce, bold eye, its short, proud head of a winy grey, its breast and pinions so blue, spotted with black, with penfeathers of black and dazzling white. No creature seems more wild, and none, in fact, is easier to tame. This very summer I tried to rear a nestling which a wanton shepherd took. I fed it hour by hour, and the little creature warmed itself in my hands. I watched it develop with a religious sense of the mystery of life. The first day I had

it, the nestling was blind, naked, motionless, half stunned from hunger and exposure; yet even then, mere lump of jelly as it was, the creature had instincts of decency, and never would defile its nest of snow-white wadding. The second day, it gave voice to a cry, and afterwards it knew me, screaming for food when I passed; on the third, its wings and half its breast were covered with the first blue feathers; on the fourth, it could rear on its legs, and began to buck and jump in the quaintest fashion. On the fifth day, alas! it fell from a table and died. My cousin had better luck, and reared a jay who lived to haunt the woods about her country house, and often fluttered to her shoulder. When, in November, she drove home to Aurillac, a matter of eleven miles, the jay, flitting from tree to tree, accompanied her carriage all the way!

While we enjoy the autumn in dreamy dilettante fashion, the peasants seldom know an idle hour, for harvest follows harvest from St. John's Day to All Saints. In October, while still the leaves are green, a ladder is set against the ash-trees in the hedge, and all the branches are clipped, except the lead; every third year each tree is thus mulcted of her spreading branches, and now you see why the ash-trees of Auvergne look slender, tall, and frail as a poplar. Sometimes, thus thwarted in their growth, they twist from side to side as they spring upwards, and look, in their round slim greenness, like great serpents in an allegory, reared aloft. They furnish, in fact, a final crop of hay, which is carefully stored in the dryest corner of the barn. Ash-leaves, green or dry, are a favourite food with cattle, sheep or goats, and vary their winter's fare at small expense. In the rare, dreaded years when the hay-crops fail, then lime and elm and oak and hazel and false-acacia are pressed into service, and the cows live scantily all winter on chopped straw and

the fodder of the hedges. The failure of the hay is a disaster in French agriculture, of terrible importance, so that even dead leaves are a crop in Auvergne, and not to be neglected. At Martinmas, the women and the children, carrying sacks, go to the brown woods and gather the fallen leaves, which give out so strange and melancholy a smell. The oak-leaves, heaped up and watered, rot and enrich the soil of the kitchen garden, where they protect the young autumn-sown plants against the severities of an Auvergnat winter. Dried leaves, in France, in garden, stable, or farmyard, serve almost all the purposes of straw.

For my part, I love to sit on a rock in the tranquil woods some sunny afternoon in mid-November, my dog at my feet as silent as myself, so silent that we scarce disquiet our neighbour the jay, caught in yonder bramble, who eyes us, his neck swelling, as he disentangles his great wings. There he goes, screaming, and the silence reigns anew. At last there stirs some breath of wind, too soft for us to feel it under cover of the trees, and the last leaves fall down in great packets with a soft, dull, mysterious thud and shiver: plop!—which frightens my dog Sylvester half out of his wits.

Down in the field below, the women are busy. Every man within a range of many miles is absent to-day at Aurillac for the Martinmas Fair; and, as the ploughs for once are left at home, the women, free from field work for one afternoon, have decided to restuff their mattresses. Soon after dawn they came and gathered the beech-leaves beneath the trees, raking them in heaps, piling them in sacks, and finally strewing them to dry and air, like hay, in the sunny fields at the base of the woods. And now, this afternoon, here they come with their mattress-sacks of white canvas, fresh washed and speckless, into which they cram

their harvest of beech-leaves. The weather has been fine for some weeks, so we trust their bedding may not be too damp. Now that the leaves are gathered, but only now, they will drive the pigs into the woods to feed on the acorns, while the children collect the beech-mast, "the olive of the North," carefully treasured for the winter's oil.

That last is an important consideration. Oil for burning o' nights in the long winter evenings; oil for frying and cooking in a land where butter is scanty and poor, for our milk (so rich in caseum) has very little cream. The nut-harvest follows the gathering of the leaves; and the walnut, of course, affords the richest crop. Every farm has its walnut orchard, and while the men knock the fruit from the trees with long poles and perches, the maidservants shell the nuts and prepare them for the mill. Thence will return the salad-oil; while the beech-mast, hazel, and hemp-grain will furnish the three-beaked brass *liin*, or Roman lamp, all winter. At Olmet, the fisherman (who, from his little farm down by the river, ensnares and nets all summer such trout as the otter leaves him to make an honest penny by) turns miller in winter, and crushes the walnut harvest, in a great cellar, between two millstones of black basalt; an ass is harnessed to the upper millstone, and turns laboriously round and round in the dim place, while the oil streams from the crushed kernels. The pulp left apparently dry, but still impregnate with oil and aroma, is an excellent food for fatting beasts, and not despised by the young of the human race. This is the perquisite of the miller. Would I could make you see him—a tall, lean peasant, full of a rough poetry as he curses his foe, the otter, who eats the speckled trout at dawn in the fisher's nets!

If there is a harvest of nuts, there is also a harvest of feathers. The nights are getting cold, it is time to look to

the bedding. Every farm keeps its tribe of geese, whose down (plucked from the living bird six times a year, at new moon) is now sufficient in quantity to make or refresh our *édredons*. The poultry yards afford material for the feather-beds; the flocks of brown sheep give their fleece for the mattress, and for the warm Auvergnat quilts of wool, sewn fast between two sheets of flowered cotton print. All these must be made over or renewed. Our dark and somewhat dingy farms have soft, clean, and ample beds piled high in their kitchens, wherein to brave the shudders of snowy winter nights.

These are play-harvests; but the gathering and preparing of the hemp is a thing of time and patience. Every farm in the Cantal has, in some sunny corner of a field, a little three-cornered walled space, *l'ort de lo combi* (the hemp-garden). Here the handsome sturdy plants are grown, and hence, in July, the male stems are torn, to make more room for the seeding of the female plant. A little after Michaelmas these are ripe. They are torn up by the roots, and left to ferment in upright heaps well covered. Eight days later their martyrdom begins; they are shaken till the seed falls from the pod; they are stretched in a water-meadow to rot; they are dried in the oven; they are rubbed, beaten, crushed, pounded, combed with iron combs, till nothing is left of their sturdy green grace and rustic beauty, no likeness of the poor handsome female plant, only a mass of loose tow and formless fibre. And from this the grey thread is spun, on autumn afternoons and evenings, as the women follow their flocks along the lanes, or sit round the fire, cracking jokes with the grandfather on his comfortable settle in the inglenook. Every village has its weaver. When the thread is spun he puts it on his loom, and weaves the strong hand-made hemp-linen from which our

farms are furnished with sheets, table-cloths, napkins, white shirts for the men and underwear for the women. It comes home in dreary lengths of grey, and must be bleached in the morning dew, before the capable hands, which have planted and prepared the hemp and spun the thread, can fashion and sew the tissue. Open the linen-cupboard in any farm kitchen, and you will be amazed at the wealth of its heaps of rustic creamy white.

Our weavers do not weave, our women do not spin, only hemp-thread and linen. Every man on the country-side, of the peasant class, is clad in the stout *rase* (thick rough cloth), or frieze, which his brown flocks wore first of all, his own hands sheared, his wife's clever fingers spun, and which was woven on the village loom. Never have I seen so stout, so thick a fabric. One glance at the heavy cloth, striped brown and black from the undyed wool of our sheep, makes one understand the nipping cold of winter on our hills.

Meanwhile, the buckwheat has been harvested and garnered; on sunny afternoons the old wives winnow the grain in sieves on every threshold. The poorer sort goes to feed the fowls and fatten the calves for the Martinmas fair; while the perfect grain is set aside for the daily *bourriols*. The apples now are ripe. They should be gathered, save the later sorts, and laid on straw in the fruitery, before the little cowherds come down from the mountains. The chestnuts must be brought from the lower valleys—a dozen miles away, where the conjunction of a milder climate with a granite soil lets them grow in abundance; the potatoes must be uprooted from the fields. With buckwheat-meal, potatoes, chestnuts in store, the farm can affront the winter. And now, in this year's potato-field, the plough is put; and the sower, with a noble gesture, scatters far and wide the grain of the rye. Two women follow him

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and gather in a basket any stray potatoes now upturned. And close after the plough hop some half-dozen ash-grey buntings, neat and slender, pecking the worms and seeds from the new-turned clods.

## IX

The oxen scarcely quit the yoke, for the winter crops must all be sown by Martinmas, and the compassionate farmer throws a pint of oats into their every feed. But, busy as we are, to-day is holiday. It is the 15th of October, and the herds return from the mountain. A great music of cowbells awoke us at five in the morning; one hears a tramp of feet, and the loud greetings of the herdsmen, whom the whole village turns out to welcome; the cows utter long "moos" of excitement and delight; in their midst we see a rustic cart or chariot piled high with great cheeses—each cow of the herd should have produced at least three of these huge moons during the five months of its *Estivade.* Without a word from the herdsman, the beasts stop at Langeac's farm and turn into the pastures they left in May, lowing and frolicking for joy despite the fatigue of the night-long march. Happier still are the herdsmen. The master-*vacher* tosses his baby in the air; the little *pâtre* has found his mother; the herdsmen are talking eagerly to a knot of relatives and friends. What joy to see the valley, and the last bright asters in the gardens, and the apples red and gold in the orchard trees! How they eye that bright one out of reach on the topmost bough! (And again a verse of Sappho rings in my mind:—

Ὡς γλυκύμαλον ἐρευθεται ἄκρῳ ἐπ' ὄσδῳ.)

What a pleasure to breakfast by the hearth at home on a

bowl of new milk, in which they crush the first toasted chestnuts of the autumn! How large and cheerful the greystone houses look after the windshaken *buron* on the mountain-top! Not to-night (for all of them will sleep), but for many a night after, towards midnight, a whisper may be heard in Langeac's orchard. A group of shadowy forms moves under the apple-branches. One might suppose a sudden wind in the trees, for plop! plop! fall the ripe fruit on the soft grass beneath. But the wary farmer knows what to expect; a shutter screams on its hinges, a window opens, and there in the yellow light of the candle is Farmer Langeac in his shirt-sleeves. The herd boys scurry away, swiftly and silently, with bulging pockets. For my part, out of compassion, I leave them one tree, not the best—but they prefer them hard as iron.

## X

All Saints is at hand! The winds turn sharp and keen. Sometimes at this season we have, in the Cantal, an exquisite St. Martin's summer, with sunny days reaching up till mid-November, as mild as Michaelmas. Now the wood-cutters set to work and replenish the store of beech-trunks in the shed; now the carts come down from the moors, piled with an aromatic load of broom-twigs neatly tied in faggots; now the heather is cut; now the leaves are piled in sacks, to furnish fodder all the winter long. The first-sown corn is already green above the sod, and still, day after day, the plough is in the field, while on the steeper hills the oxen draw a mere curved tooth of wood—the Roman *aratro*, our *araire*. The cattle still browse the meadows; all night the hillsides are melodious with their chiming bells. The

orchard trees are pruned and cut back; their branches are carefully stored for lighting the oven on baking days. The sunny noontide is still as busy as in summer, and scarcely less pleasant, but over these last golden hours hangs a sword of Damocles—the Winter, which may arrive in full array to-morrow. For if, in the Cantal, we reckon to some extent on a fine spell early in November, still we taste fearfully the uncertain, unsecure delight; any night the snow may fall and end the labours of the farm until it first begins to melt in March.

> "Como jious lo cenre uno cato,
> Per Toutchion, mai des couots pus lèu.
> Nostro bièlho Oubergno s'ocato
> Jious uno flessado de nèu"

("Like a cat in the warm ashes of the hearth, at All Saints and sometimes sooner still, our old Auvergne snuggles down in a soft quilt of snow"). Adieu, lark and swallow! Poor cicada, perish in thy frozen hole! No more flowers, no more birds, save the great croaking crows that flap across the milk-white fields. Winter is here!

The daily round has narrowed its circle. A path is cut from the door to the gate, another to stable and drinking-trough, where the unfrozen ever-flowing fountain plashes over a fringe of icicles. The walls of snow glitter and melt not in the sunniest noon. The farm-kitchen is now the centre of all works and days. The huge hearth-place is a cavern of warmth and glow. Soon after three the hilltop intercepts the sun; a little later, the beasts having been milked and fed, masters and men assemble round the fire. From the ceiling hangs the three-beaked Roman lamp, but the flames, leaping from the beech-root on the fire-dogs, give a brighter light. Rare are the farms as yet where a petroleum lamp enlivens the gloom. The farm-hands,

cutting a bough of cherry or beech, renew the handles of their scythes, mend their tools, or knock a fresh set of nails into their sabots. The women twirl their distaffs and spinning-wheels or sew their seam ; on a corner of the table, Urbain, the elder son, who has been to the Regiment, reads last week's local paper ; Touènou, the little *pâtre*, sprawls in the blaze and pulls the tail of the cat ; comfortably ensconced on the cushioned settle, the old gaffer of eighty tells many a story of local tradition, or repeats for the hundredth time his famous account of a journey to Limoges in 1840, or makes the shadows creepier with tales about the Drac. A little after six the supper is spread : a porringer of soup, followed by the bacon and the cabbage which gave it flavour, and a nugget of cheese. By seven, a neighbour or so has strolled in to share the *veillée*.

The *veillée* is, and ever has been, the one recreation of our village winter ; with All Saints' Eve their reign sets in and endures till Lent begins. In a hamlet like Olmet, where there are several farms of some importance, each has its circle of clients ; and after supper every night the humbler neighbours throng to the warm farm-kitchen, where the women knit or spin, while the men weave baskets or mend their tools. If there be a pretty girl in the household, be sure the youth of the countryside will throng from all the hamlets near. While the farmers talk of beasts and crops, while the women lead the wit and the gossip, lasses and lads have their own affairs at heart. There will be marriages at Easter. For in the country, men, like birds and cattle, have their season for pairing, and the leisurely, laughter-filled evenings that divide All Saints from Ash Wednesday are the courting-tide.

Time flies. The farmer throws a handful or two of chestnuts to roast in the embers, and sets, mayhap, on the

table a bottle of red wine. And the stories and the gossip begin again till the log, burned through, falls with a crash from the fire-dogs and sends up a fountain of sparks. The cricket sings shrill, but hark! without the snow-blast sings more shrilly yet. The clock strikes nine. Master and men arise and bid each other good night. The neighbours light their lanterns and don a sort of Inverness cloak—their *limousines;* the cowherd goes to seek his warm bed in the cow-stable. And the door, opened an instant for their egress, reveals the gusty moon-shot night and the vast expanse, dazzling, and yet dim, of endless snow—a polar landscape, inhospitable and sad.

# A MANOR IN TOURAINE

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(La Commanderie de Ballan)

1903

## I

AN old irregular house, a long grey line in the hollow, founded by the Templars some eight hundred years ago and finished yesterday. In 1189, Henry II. of England lay there for a night, very sick, on his way to die at Chinon. The house was then a Commanderie of the Knights-Templar: we know how they perished! In all ages, I think, patriotism in France has shown two sides—two faces, if you will; the one aristocratic, desiring the advancement of the nation by means of an *élite*, a chosen few, to whose perfection the common sort was to be sacrificed; the other, essentially popular, full of dreams and visions, plotting a general happiness and justice made absolute on earth. The Templars were of the former party. Early in the fourteenth century, a democratic king made a clean sweep of them, confiscated their wealth, and left our Commanderie to bear an empty name. Doubtless, at the moment, King Philip was full of virtuous schemes. A volume of documents, edited by Renan, shows the wise uses to which the French Government intended to put this lucky potful of treasure: there

is a plan for popular education, elaborated by a certain Pierre Du Bois, which we might read to-day, with colleges for women, scholarships for lady doctors, an Order of Nursing Sisters to be sent to the colonies—all strangely modern for 1306. High schools for boys and girls, with special facilities for studying the natural and moral sciences, were to be established in the existing Commanderies. But nothing came of it, of course; and no one knows exactly what hole in fourteenth-century finance was stopped by the nuggets of the unfortunate Knights-Templar.

Our Commanderie remained a Commanderie. It was handed over to the Knights of Malta. So much and no more do we know of its fate from the time of Philip the Fair till the French Revolution. For five hundred years a mist envelops it. The nineteenth century was to raise its fortunes.

One of Napoloen's marshals had a son—himself a prince and a soldier—unhappily married to a lady of unattractive virtue. A nervous, artistic, irascible man, he went about still seeking his ideal, *circuit rudens, quærens quem devoret.* He found it, unfortunately for her, in the maiden daughter of one of his old friends. Often have I heard of a certain dinner-party given by the girl's father—an old general—in honour of the prince, and how the guests waited in the stiff yellow Empire *salon*, where the clock on the chimneypiece struck, first the half-hour, then the hour; and yet the prince never appeared; and still the young hostess lingered in her pressing-room. At last the dreadful truth burst upon the hungry and anxious company—they had eloped together!

Save for this one great slip in conduct, the lady was a saint—a mute inglorious George Eliot. She reclaimed her lover, whose courses up to that time had been of the most devious, and showed him the sweetness of a calm, domestic life. She even reconciled him with his virtuous spouse, and

if, as I fear, she broke her father's heart, she lived to be blessed by the family she had outraged. Society in France still bore traces of the recent upheaval of the Revolution; the rule of morals was relaxed, and passion was held a great excuse. The lady's character and her lover's rank and fidelity combined to attenuate their fault: people ended by thinking of her as a sort of morganatic wife. She would say sometimes to her partner in shame: "My dear, you must not neglect the good princess. Remember she has always the first claim on your attention." If, thus despatched to his duties, he stayed too long at home, the prince's lawful helpmeet would remark one day: "*Mon ami,* it is a long time since you looked after your plantations at the Commanderie." There is a beautiful old romance by Marie de France called *Eliduc, or, The Man with Two Wives.* With no less gracious a courtesy, no less delicate a sense of a rival's due and a lover's duty, did these two nineteenth-century ladies grace a difficult, an impossible, position.

The prince had bought our ancient manor-house to hide therein his unespousèd saint. He rebuilt the tumbling walls, restored roof and ceilings; it was he, no doubt, who drained the fishpond which used to stand so close to the front door. He made the place a little paradise. He was rich; he sent all over both worlds, old and new, for rare trees to plant the hilly park which rises about the small grey priory, gently swelling to a rim of oakwoods all around. The park is, as it were, a brief and shallow valley from which the river has long disappeared, leaving only a tiny, almost invisible streamlet which trickles through the softest lawns, planted now with groups of silvery Atlas cedars; with old hollow chestnuts, which—they, at least—must date back some two hundred years, so far have they gone in the sere and yellow leaf; with Californian cypresses, which flame all autumn until their

fiery needles rust and fall; with strange pines that grow in a pyramid; with deodoras and monkey-trees from India; with copper beech and silvery maple. He stocked the place with antelopes, guanacos, and llamas, quaint, shy creatures, housed in folds under the spreading trees, that would come to the palings and feed, tame and timid, from their lady's hand. And here, as quiet and lonely as Adam and Eve in their garden, lived these unlawful lovers, eternally sequestered. He, indeed, had his excursions and forthcomings, incidental to the existence of a man with two wives, but she, poor soul, wrapt in a veil of tender shame, dared not show her face beyond the unfenced boundaries of her woods, and did by stealth her very deeds of mercy.

Some fifty years ago, both prince and lady died. The house and lands then came by purchase into the hands of some friends of mine, who have considerably extended the lands of their domain. The younger brother married an exquisite young *sociétaire* of the Comédie Française—a young lady, pure as pearl, good as gold, of a sort rare, though not impossible, upon the stage, in France. To this paradise of the Commanderie he brought his young wife; but—alas for our terrestrial Edens!—she died there before the year was out. When the widower followed her, he left the house to his elder brother, a soldier of some note, who turned his sword into a ploughshare, and devoted himself to his vineyards and cornfields. His daughter is mistress of the manor-house to-day.

As it stood when it came into her hands, the Commanderie was a fit pavilion for a pair of lovers, but scarcely the hospitable home of a numerous family. Much of it had to be rebuilt and much restored. A story was added. One day, when the masons were taking down an ugly plaster ceiling from a small room in the tower, there underneath they

THE COMMANDERIE AT BALLAN

Some fifty years ago, both prince and lady died. The house and lands then came by purchase into the hands of

found, still solid, still fresh and clear, the ancient beams and roof-trees of a distant century, painted with the coat-of-arms of the Knights of Malta.

## II

It is in autumn that you should visit the Commanderie. The house, still relatively small, is picturesque, a long irregular priory or manor-house, with lancet chapel-windows at one end, and in the centre a jutting pseudo-gothic turret that masks the staircase. With its mullioned windows and grey walls hung with crimson creeper, it looks at first sight rather Scotch or English than French. The lawn that spreads in front confirms the impression. Our grass plots in France are generally left to grow for hay, and stand tall with flowers and seeding-grasses, save for a band clean shaven near the house. But my friend here is of Lord Bacon's thinking: "That nothing is more Pleasant to the Eye than *Greene Grasse* kept finely shorn." A velvet lawn stretches between the infrequent lovely beds heaped so high, where the tall cannas outflame the red and orange touches on the woods, where pale-blue plumbagos, yellow canariensis, and violet clematis, twining over hop-poles, fall in loose garlands and festoons like coloured fountains of flowers. So the green expanse sweeps up the slope till it meets a glade of browner oak-trees, starred thickly underfoot with crimson cyclamen. Beyond a wandering path the oak-wood rustles, and crowns the height.

So much for the view from the front; east and west, the park stretches, occupying a combe between the wooded slopes. Turning east, you cross the moat, inseparable from every ancient manor-house in France, you pass the orangery with its terrace, where the trees stand out in pots all summer,

and so you arrive at a series of large walled gardens or *potagers.* You enter by a *rosarium* where, well to the south, sheltered by stone walls draped with peaches in espalier, the roses grow profusely, not trained over balls or arches, nor cut into standards, but somewhat wild and bushy, just as Nature made them. Invisible at their feet, flat beds of mignonette, verbena, violet and heliotrope give odour; for the rose is a fast flower of its smell, as Lord Bacon noticed (when writing of gardens one may surely quote him twice): "And you may walk by a whole row of them and find nothing of their sweetness." From the rose-garden starts a long rectangle of three walled *potagers* in a suite, opening into each other like a set of state rooms. The walls of all alike are trained and pleached with fruit-trees, and more especially, in this first one, with vines: trellises of grapes, purple and white, and that small golden sort called Chasselas, whose flavour is perhaps unrivalled. The three gardens communicate by means of arched gateways, through which—right through from end to end—runs a broad gravelled walk, set on either side with deep, high banks of common flowers for cutting, such as roses, chrysanthemums, zinnias, asters, phlox, dahlias, and cannas, tall Paris daisies, freesias, and autumn lilies. Behind this varied screen stretch the beds of fruit and vegetables, strawberries and raspberries, which ripen on into latest autumn, melons and asparagus, artichokes and cardoons, green peas, French beans and scarlet-runners—such, in fact, as make some decorative show; for this first garden is a favourite place for sheltered walking. To the second garden are relegated the salads of different sorts: lettuce and *romaine,* spinach and sorrel, scarole, celery and chicory, capucin's beard and *bette* and endive; while in the third grow the cabbages, carrots, turnips, parsnips, Japanese crosnes, Jerusalem artichokes, Brussels sprouts, onions, leeks, potatoes,

and their kind. Above the suite of gardens, which occupy the lower slope of a gentle rise, runs a natural fringe of copse-wood; below, the upper road from Tours to Ballan divides them from a considerable vineyard, which bears, on a little holm, a fourth walled garden, or *clos*, filled with orchard trees of a finer sort than those planted everywhere about the fields. This is especially sacred to those golden plums for which the country round Tours is celebrated.

The small estate of the Commanderie comprises some two hundred and forty acres (96 hectares), of which fifty-five are laid out in park or woods, forty in pasture, thirty-five in vineyards, eighty in arable land for corn, about thirty in orchards and gardens. It has amused me to compare this distribution with that of Ausonius' *herediolus*, or small family estate, which, though it seemed a very little property in Roman Gaul, was more than twice as large as the Commanderie. The fourth-century poet, who takes us into his confidence on all occasions, does not forget to lay before us the plan of his ancestral inheritance near Bordeaux. He had some fifty acres of pasture, one hundred acres of vineyard, two hundred acres of corn-land, and about as much forest as cultivated land. But to return to modern times and the Commanderie. The vineyards, with their five and thirty acres, cover far less space than formerly, for in October, 1885, the dreaded phylloxera made its appearance in Touraine, surely and gradually spreading desolation. All the vineyards of the estate before us have been replanted in the last eight years with American roots, which are invulnerable to the trans-atlantic pest, and chiefly with *Rupestris* and *Riparia*, especially the vine of the latter sort called *Gloire de Touraine*. On these are grafted the native vines—the expense of the whole process of uprooting, ploughing, planting and grafting costing not less than sixty pounds sterling for the hectare—

that is to say, for two and a half English acres. After four or five years the new plants begin to yield abundantly, especially if they are budded with the prolific vines of the country, the purple *Gros lot* or white *Folle Blanche*, either of which produces an excellent *vin ordinaire*. At the Commanderie, where the grafts are all of the finer sort, the yield, in the best years, does not exceed some forty hectolitres to the hectare. Twice as much is frequent in the fruitful South.

Some twenty years ago this little town of Ballan was a place of great prosperity. Every sunny slope all round was planted with the vine. The grapes of the country, besides filling the local vats, command a good price at Saumur, a neighbouring town wherein is manufactured much so-called champagne, which divine beverage, outside its natural borders, is best made from the light heady wines of these parts. Without any disguise or taking of names in vain, the *Coteaux* of the Loire produce many a famous vintage, such as the golden effervescing Vouvray, and the excellent claret of Chinon and Joué. But, alas! since 1890, too often the prosperous vineyard has become a wilderness, or is planted at best with garden-stuff or corn. The peasant-farmers no longer make a fortune each September; they barely grow for their own use some acre or so of vines. Ballan still keeps its air of solid comfort, its handsome cottages of white stone roofed with slate, its teeming vat in every cellar, its orchards laden with fruit. But, alas! money is no longer so flush in every pocket, for no crop replaces the prosperity given by the grape. You know a wine-growing village when you enter it by an air of universal well-being; and also by the industrious habits of the dwellers therein; for the vine demands unremitting care and attention, especially during the months of January, April, June, September, and October. Suppose a farmer to grow, beside

his vineyard, a field or two of corn, an acre or so of hay and some potatoes and turnips (and what farmer can grow less?). You will see, if you count the times of sowing and reaping, that he can have but little time to play the John-o'-Dreams.

## III

Close to the kitchen gardens of the Commanderie lies the farmyard, a picturesque and pleasant place where I love to loiter of an afternoon. In the middle stands a squat round tower of considerable girth. Whatever it was of old (gateway, tower, or colombarium), to-day it is a dairy, chosen for this office on account of the mighty thickness of its walls and consequent evenness of the temperature within. The vaulted roof of the ground floor is lined, like the walls, with bright enamelled tiles, blue and green; the flags are laid with such evenness that not a speck of dust can shelter there in any cranny; tables of lava support the spotless vessels for the milk; the churns and separators are as neat and dainty as if they stood there not for use, but for ornament. How different from the rough and (truth to tell) the grimy floors, the squalid deal bench, the primitive churns and cheese-wrings of our wind-beaten mountain *burons* in Auvergne!

True that down here in the plains there is less milk to care for. The excellent Norman cows of the Commanderie give, in favourable circumstances, as much as twenty litres of milk a day, whereas our hard-worked, curly-coated, red Cantal kine seldom yield more than eight; but then Madame Langeac has more than fourscore heads of cattle in her rude granges at Olmet, and the herd is larger still at Comblat, across the valley; while the handsome gothic cow-house of the Commanderie counts but one and twenty beasts, luxuriously

housed, ten on either side the central gallery or platform. And this is a large *vacherie* for Touraine. A farm of fifty acres here possesses barely half a dozen cows; for while in Auvergne the cattle are the mainstay of an estate devoted to pasture, here, in this land of corn and wine, they are just the purveyors of the household dairy. Neither cheese nor butter is a great source of profit, and the cows never work in the fields.

Next to the cow-house stands a building of great importance—the wine-press, with its cellar for the vats. The cylinders merely caress their ripest loads of grapes; broken by the mass of their own weight, they yield the sweetest of their juice for the *mère-goutte*, mother of wines of choice. But the *vin-de-presse*, or usual red wine—which is tonic, and (when new) a little harsh—is crushed from the fruit by great rollers, which bruise the pulp, break the skins, shatter the pips, and extract the secret tannin. The *mère-goutte* is all perfume and aroma; the *vin-de-presse* is stronger and has more body. A wise hand often delicately doses a mixture of the two, endowed with the qualities of either; one-fourth of the sharper wine added to the *mère-goutte* ensures its keeping.

I always used to think that red wine was made from purple grapes, and white wine from white ones; so it was, no doubt, until, in 1688, Dom Pérignon, abbot of Haut Villiers, in Champagne, invented our modern wine of champagne, which is made from black grapes. The differences lies in the treatment, not in the colour of the skin: the white wine is drawn off the solid residue before it enters into fermentation; the red wine stands on the aromatic detritus from which it has been crushed, and absorbs its qualities: red wine must evidently be more impregnate with tannin. After the juice has been decanted, whether white or red, a great body of

pulp remains, still flush and full of alcohol, rich in perfume and savour. Supposing you add a little water to this mass, having well broken it up; if on the morrow you pour on a little more, and do so day by day, until you reach about one-sixth the volume of the juice drawn off; if then you let the liquor stand for ten days or so to ferment, and finally decant the renovated must into barrels, which you keep hermetically sealed; in this way, you may obtain an excellent light drink, called *piquette*, or sometimes merely *la boisson*, much used by farmers and labourers in France. It contains from five to eight per cent. of alcohol, and is the equivalent of our English beer. But often (though not at the Commanderie) in countries like Touraine, where the alcoholic value of the grape is generally low, we sacrifice the good and innocent piquette to what is called the second wine, or *vin de sucre*, or *vin de marc*—a liquid obtained by the fermentation of sugared water added to the pulp. I fear that men of science —especially Chaptal and Parmentier—are responsible for this practice, which is a tampering with Bacchus. It has, however, the practical result of raising by some three per cent. the amount of alcohol, so as to make a second wine which simulates the natural juice. Again, in cold and rainy seasons, when the fruit ripens ill, even the first loads of grapes are often powdered with sugar which, while it counteracts their acidity, increases the strength of the liquid, and is said to augment its resistance to the malady of *la graisse*, that scourge of weak white wines. When in the last resort the wine is drawn off, the pulp which remains is frequently made into food for the beasts. This latter is an excellent practice. A great chemist of my acquaintance (in point of fact, my husband, Emile Duclaux) asserts that alcohol should form a part of the usual dietary of cattle, being, in fact, when economically dosed by the scientific hand, an unrivalled and easily digested

aliment. As for the wine, it sells at any price, from twenty or thirty francs a hectolitre for the coarse rustic kinds, to sixty francs for the same amount of a choicer sort, such as is made at the Commanderie.

Beyond the press, the far end of the farmyard is formed by a row of light neat sheds for carts and tools, and a wooden barn—far smaller than our Cantal granges. Opposite the cow-house stand the duck-pond and the fowl-pen—loud with the cries of geese, turkeys, ducks, fowls, and pigeons. All told, the fowl-yard counts some five hundred birds. Some of them are absent. The ducks swim on the moat; the turkeys occupy, on a green slope of the park, one of those folds wherein some fifty years ago the antelopes used to arch their lovely necks. As we pass it, a brooding turkey-hen hurries her nestlings swiftly under her wings. For see! there aloft, poised in the blue, so high, so high overhead, that blot of steady black is the watching buzzard. For a mile round you may hear the wail of its strange mournful cry, so melancholy that one might suppose the striking of its prey less a sport than a heart-breaking necessity.

## IV

Let us leave the farm and the farmyard, and pass through the gardens to the house, where it sleeps in the sunlight in its coat of many colours—ivy, virginia creeper, wistaria, and rose; then let us turn down the green valley of the park towards the village or small town of Ballan. The topmost edges of the combe are covered on either hand with copse-woods of oak. Great Spanish chestnuts, hollow and dis-crowned, stand about the first green slopes of the turf, especially on the northern side of the tiny invisible streamlet

which, in the patient course of untold centuries, has scooped out this sheltered bottom. Below the chestnuts stand a group or two of stately Atlas cedars, which even in broad daylight seem to keep a perpetual moonbeam glinting on their silvered branches. The grass lies plain in the bottom, where the son of the house has planned a tennis-court; beyond runs the yard-wide brook, whose banks are planted with deciduous cypresses from Louisiana, magnificently hectic in the flush of their decay. There is no better tree for containing a wandering stream on its course through a valley, for the strong roots run together in a natural dyke on either side the bed; green as a pine in summertime, few trees are so beautiful between September and All Saints, when the bald cypress (as it is misnamed) rivals in splendour with the maple or the cherry. I wonder it is not more usually planted in the milder regions of the south of England, whose warm moist climate would permit its growth. The Louisiana cypress fears a heavy frost, a rigorous winter; but it would prosper in Dorset, in Devon or in Cornwall as it prospers in Touraine, and is not only a magnificent ornament, but an unexampled drainer of a marshy region.

A mile through the park and half a mile through woods and fields brings us to the pleasant little place of Ballan—a "gros bourg," as they say in France, something between a village and a little country town. How charming are the *gros bourgs* of Touraine—Vouvray and Montrichard, Savonnières or Ballan—with their neat white houses, built of freestone topped with slate, a raised flight of stone steps leading to the door, and large ornamented windows, one or two on either side the entrance; there is a trellised vine up the front, there are flowers in the garden, fruit-trees everywhere! These villages have brought prosperity to the very brink of poetry. Once I spent five weeks at Chenonceau, living at the village

inn, a humble place enough,—the "Bon Laboureur." The rooms were rough and homely, with tiled floors, straw-bottomed chairs, and old-fashioned furniture of waxed walnut; but seldom have I dined better than in that rustic parlour. It is true that I was young then, and very happy. The tenderest fowls, the most melting and juicy of melons and green peas, the freshest eggs for boiling or for breaking in an omelette, the most savoury *rillettes*, the lightest white bread with fresh yellow butter, the tastiest ham, the richest abundance of peaches, grapes, plums and pears, composed our rustic diet. We thought Chenonceau a little paradise. To know a country-side one must know every class in it; therefore, not content with my five weeks in a village inn, or with some twelve summers' experience of life in a manor, I have written to a friend of mine (for before her marriage she lived five years in my service), who is the daughter of a small farmer in Touraine, asking her to send me the daily bill of fare in a cottage. She replies: "The peasants live uncommonly well in Touraine. Two or three times a day, according to the season, they have an excellent meal consisting of soup — generally cabbage-soup — followed by a dish of beans and bacon, or a ragout of mutton, or a piece of braised beef, or maybe a fricassee of veal or a civet of rabbit, but meat of some sort, and very seldom merely bacon; for dessert, they have goats'-milk cheese, for every farm has its goats, with fruit, and plenty of common red wine, for every cottage has its acre or so of vineyard."

In fact, by force of circumstance, every dweller in Touraine becomes, for the time being, more or less of an epicure. To arrive there in October from our Cantal mountains is a startling change of scene. On our summits, perhaps, already the snow has shed its first fresh whiteness; a few pears and apples ripen reluctant in the orchards; and if the garden

yield us carrots and cabbage, we scarcely dream of more. In Touraine the very hillsides run down with bunches of ripe grapes; the fruit-trees by the road bow beneath a weight of pears and plums. The peaches hang against the garden walls; the raspberry-canes are rosy still with fruit. It seems an Eden of plenty and mellow fruitfulness. And there would be a blank ingratitude in taking no delight in these rich offerings of Mother Earth. It is natural here that one's fancy should play about the preparation of a future meal; we feed the turkeys with walnuts all October to ensure a feast for Martinmas; we walk in the *potager* and criticize the matting of the handsome *cardons;* we see to the banking of the celery. So near to such an ample Nature, a sort of poetry invades these homely details, and the daily meal becomes, not just a dinner, but a pious banquet offered up in praise of Ceres.

## V

My friend of the Commanderie has kindly obtained from the *mairie* of Ballan a list of the different estates and properties which compose the commune: a total computed at some 6,500 acres. There are eighteen estates of more than 30 hectares (75 acres); there are seventy-five farms between 10 and 30 hectares; there are one hundred and thirty-two small cottage farms between 1 and 10 hectares (from 2½ to 25 acres)—which is as much as to say, that there are in all two hundred and twenty-five landlords in a commune which counts only four hundred and fifty voters. Every second man is a person of property! The population of farm-labourers and servants is therefore small, and exclusively employed on the few large estates. My second informant

(the peasant farmer's daughter) writes: "To work a small farm to profit, the family of the farmer must suffice. Even in a largish property—25 hectares (about 63 acres)—you can manage with two men, two women, and two horses. (Admire the progression!) The cows here do no field work, and are kept for milk and meat. On a farm of this size, you should have six good Normandy cows, two or three goats, two pigs, plenty of rabbits and fowls. The heifers arrive at a profitable age when they are from two to three years old; they should then bear a calf each spring; when the calf is from six to eight weeks old, you should sell it to the butcher for from 30 to 50 francs, if the animal turn the scale alive at 50 kilos. The mother will now give milk for another five months. The goats also are useful; a she-goat gives at least three litres of milk a day. The little round flat cream-cheeses made from goats' milk are sold at 1½*d.* each in summer, 3*d.* a piece in winter, and are a considerable source of profit. As for the land, we sow it in a rotation of crops: firstly, we sow wheat in the autumn, on which we sow in March a crop of clover to follow the harvest, then in late autumn we sow barley; after the barley is reaped, in the following summer, you should let the land rest a year before you sow with wheat again in October. (This fallacy of fallow lands still obtains among the lower class in France, though the agricultural schools have taught the well-to-do farmer to exact a harvest every year from land enriched with chemical manures, or refreshed by an occasional crop of clover, vetch or buckwheat, ploughed into the soil while green, between harvest and autumn seed-time. But, to resume.) The clover is for the cows. Here they do not live in the fields as in Auvergne, but chiefly in the stables. In the summer we feed them three times a day with beet-root or turnip-tops, cabbage, and clover; in the winter we make a good soup of wheat-chaff,

bran, beetroots, and a sort of oil-cake made from the crushed pulp of the walnuts left in the oil-press; boiling water is poured on this, it is left to ferment for two hours; and then, just slightly warm, it is given to the cows in the stable. They have this soup twice a day, and the rest of the time we give them something every two hours or so, generally a mangerful of dried clover, cabbage-leaves and chopped straw." There is no hay, you observe, in this substantial diet. Nor does she speak of the large yellow pumpkins which, in the greater part of Touraine, are so useful a food both for man and beast. At the Commanderie, the cattle graze the pastures in summer; in winter they are fed on hay, chopped straw, beetroot soup, or potatoes, boiled Jerusalem artichokes, mangel-wurzel and swedes, made into a warm pottage. How our neighbours at Olmet would stare if I suggested a *purée* of vegetables for the cows!

A large family is a source of wealth to the farmer, who has to pay five pounds a year to his herdboy or goose-girl, ten or twelve pounds a year to the maid who helps his wife, and sixteen pounds a year to every labourer and ploughman, in addition to their keep. So when the farmer really *is* a farmer and cultivates his neighbour's land, his quiver is well plenished, as in Auvergne. But in Touraine the peasant works on his own land; and the dread of having to divide that treasured morsel, dearer than wife or child, sorely limits his descendants. A law permitting a greater freedom in the making of wills would certainly be followed by an immediate increase in the rural population. The French as a nation are lovers of children and hoarders of money. Who would not multiply the curly heads around the bowl of cabbage-soup, and save by the same stroke the money spent in wages?

A labourer living and eating in his own cottage earns in Touraine, as a rule, some two and thirty pounds a year, or

is paid for piecework at a rate of threepence an hour. Or if he hire himself out by the day, he earns two francs in winter, finding his own food; three francs from haymaking to harvest; and five francs for the few golden weeks that pay the rent. The rate of wages is to me a mystery. A long course of mediæval studies has left no doubt in my mind that in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and down to the middle of the sixteenth century, the rural class of the population was better paid and wealthier, in relation to the rest of society, than is the case to-day. Never perhaps have the poor been poorer than in the last three or four hundred years—the era of polite civilization. And yet the peasant of Touraine is not a Socialist. Patient, thrifty, humorous, deliberate, and practical, he takes things as they are, and finds them, on the whole, not amiss.

Positive and superstitious, slow and sure, subtle, cautious, and independent, the labourer of Touraine is a character apart; so different from our rough and genial farmers of the Cantal, that it seems strange to think that one and the other are just peasants of Central France. He is fond of pleasure; and though a good worker, a lover of his ease. No man knows better how to hang a garland round the Altar of Duty—a rare art. "*Molles Turones*," said Cæsar; and Tasso thought the peasant here was like his land, which is "molle, lieta e dilettosa." But this softness, this measure which knows nor haste nor passion, are enforced by a patient continuity. Look at the countryman as he saunters along his fields, dressed in a dark-blue blouse, open over a decent woollen suit. He appears the happiest of mortals, nonchalant, easy-going, humorous and delicate. His women are worthy of him. The elder women of Touraine are dignified and lovely to behold in their long circular cloaks of black cloth, and the fine and costly conch of embroidered

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muslin that discreetly veils the dark hair. One charming young girl, born to this decorous and dainty costume, used to sport on Sundays (when I knew her) a singular erection of chip, ostrich feathers out of curl, and pink muslin convolvulus. One day I regretted the earlier head-dress. She replied: "Never again, madame, never again! The first day I went into Tours settled that question. Those idle people on the Rue Royale looked at me with a sort of pity (or, perhaps, as you say, ma'am, it was admiration, but I found it very wounding), as if I existed for their entertainment, rather than on my own account." The little speech, with its fierce independence, was quite as good a piece of local colour as the cap. Jeannette was a person of a refined and delicate temperament, not uncommon in Touraine, and full of quaint niceties of thought, feeling, and expression; but, for all that, she had some vulgar failings of her class: she was fond of money and superstitious. She was quite aware of the first defect, and was sensitive enough to appreciate the beauty of disinterestedness; sometimes she would say, as if she complained of some hereditary malady: "It grieves me to be so avaricious! But something inside me pushes me that way." She never, I think, discovered that she was superstitious, deeming rather the people of Paris a foolhardy race for not taking certain obvious precautions. . . . Jeannette, for instance, would not have married into a family of which any member was afflicted even with auburn hair, and when I admired the shade we politely call Venetian, she would exclaim: "Every one knows the meaning of red hair. There's a sorcerer in that family!" In Touraine, the sorcerer—the *jeteux de sorts*—has often more authority in a village than the priest; and many a sensible farmer wears in secret some article of clothing wrong side out as a means of diverting the witch's cruel spell. Once, when I changed house, I found my good Jeannette had

loosed her purse-strings to buy a young cockerel; she sacrificed it in my new bedroom, letting at least one spot of the blood fall on the fresh planks: "For the house is new," she said, "and some one must die in it before the year's out; better it should be the bird than madame!" She used to tell me all her dreams, and would come to me weeping in a morning if she had dreamed of pearls, a marriage, or I think it was cornflowers—some unlucky blossom. She had two books in her possession. One (a sort of mumbo-jumbo, treasured from pure devotedness) was my *Life of Renan*. The other, much thumbed and tattered from long use, was *La Clef des Songes*.

I suppose such devotion to fetishes must exhaust the religious faculty, for like many superstitious persons—especially in Touraine—Jeannette was not pious. She had in her something stiffly, Puritanically, virtuous. She was loyal honest, upright, quarrelsome, affectionate, precise. While she delicately dawdled through her work, doing it in perfection, her mind was not idle; she had that thoughtful inward habit, combined with a faculty of sharp observation, which I have often noticed in the peasant class. She had a great love of justice; but especially as it affected herself. It was hard for her to see that other people are just as real and as important. Having been at one moment exposed to a baseless calumny, when it was at last cleared up, she burst into tears and exclaimed: "Ce pauv' Dreyfus!" Suddenly she understood our emotion, and what was the injustice which had caused such a to-do.

If I have drawn her portrait here, it is because Jeannette is just a specimen of the peasant of Touraine. I recognized in her the moral features of her race:—measure and tact, delicacy of sentiment, love of ease, lack of enthusiasm, a fidelity tempered by criticism. Also she made me understand

and touch, as it were, certain features of her local class. For instance, that passionate love of amusement which shows itself in summer dances on the green (the heaviest old Tourangeau farmer can dance like any sylph). In winter time, the same bent appears in the endless repartee and story-telling, round a neighbour's hearth of evenings, when the peasants gather for *la veillée*. "At least we are not dull in Touraine," Jeannette used to say, "and we are well-housed, in our nice little stone houses, with the roof stuffed full of hay and grain above us. You must sleep on a sixth floor in Paris, if you would really understand the heat of summer or the winter's cold."

## VI

The city of Tours stands on a fertile plain of chalk some three hundred feet above sea level—a plain which is diversified by the frequent valleys of considerable rivers. There are the huge and turbid Loire, the winding Indre, the clear green Cher, so wide, and yet at ease in its pebbly bed; a little further off the Creuse and the Vienne. All are great bodies of water, which elsewhere give their names to whole departments. Most of these rivers are accompanied, on one side at least, some little way inland, by a steep rocky ridge of friable white tufa, whose natural caverns are frequently inhabited, enlarged, and made into comfortable dwellings by modern troglodytes. So easy to manipulate is the soft chalky stone! Therein dwell the thrifty peasants, as cosy as a weevil in a cheese. These earthy *coteaux*, or long level lines of low-banked hills, are peculiar, I think, to France, and common in every part of it: if they lie to the north, they are generally covered by a natural copsewood; if they slope to the south,

well set to the sun, they form a perfect nursery for the vine. Near Ballan, the *coteaux* of the Cher grow an excellent red wine; the banks of the Loire produce the sparkling golden Vouvray; at Chinon, on the Indre, the vines give a claret celebrated in the south of France; Chinon, indeed, which lies a little south of Ballan, is the richest part of all the plain. It is the ample garden of France, beloved of Rabelais, and a land of rich dessert: wine and walnuts, grapes and almonds, plums and pears. If you pass in September, the orchards present a busy scene; the yellow Catherine plums are then in their perfection of mellow ripeness; they are gathered by hand with dainty care, laid to dry in the sun on wicker trays or hurdles, and baked several times in a baker's oven before they issue thence in the shape of dried fruit for the table in winter: the famous "Pruneaux de Tours." Not only the Catherine plum, chiefly grown for drying, but the delicious Reine Claude, golden hued and splashed with carmine, the Agen plum that's red and blue, and the Golden Drop, abound in these orchards; for the hardy plum-tree, that will grow anywhere, demands for its perfection a land of wide airy valleys and low-lying southern slopes. The plum is made for Touraine, and Touraine for the plum; 'tis a happy marriage. In autumn, when the orchards drop with fruit; when the slopes are covered with the turning vine; when the laden pear-trees stand round the fields, which are high with maize and clover sown for fodder after early harvest; when every farmyard, in the angle of its wall, shows a huge heap of those great ribbed and golden gourds, large enough to contain the fairy coach of Cinderella, which feed man and beast with pumpkin-soup all winter; then the plain of Touraine, under its customary sky of sunny grey, has a beauty of its own, drawn from its great wide rivers, its rocky, cavernous cliffs, its smiling valleys, its pretty hills all clothed with oats, their

round heads delicately outlined against the soft horizon, its great forests of Loches and Amboise, its rambling lanes sunk deep between two rows of pollard willows, its great, straight, white high-roads that the aspen flecks with shadow, and above all from that indescribable grace in the lie of the land which satisfies the eye with scant diversity. Arthur Young may declare it "a dead, flat, unpleasant country—a level of burnt russet meadow," and affirm the landscape to be "more uninteresting than I could have thought it possible for the vicinity of a great river to be." We will dare to differ. With Montaigne, we will cry shame on the Highlander, whose eye, too accustomed to his lochs and heather, fails to appreciate the melting beauty of Touraine. With Gilbert White, we'll declare that the rounded forms of a chalk country make it seem more alive and breathing, as it were, than any other. For one season of the year at least, Touraine is beautiful!

## VII

The kings of France always thought so. Their castles lie all round. Lovely Amboise, on the Loire, still belongs to the family of Bourbon-Orleans; but the Republic holds what time has left of Loches, so lordly throned above the Indre, with Blois, and the remains of Plessis. Beautiful Chenonceaux, built across the Cher, has lately been sold to a millionnaire from Cuba. Other foreigners last year settled at Azay-le-Rideau, the fairest, to my thinking, of all the so-called castles of the Loire; for there the Indre seems to eddy round the deserted palace of the Sleeping Beauty. The huge feudal pile which dominates the Loire at Langeais belongs to a Protestant banker from the Havre. Villandry, Moncontour,

have been purchased by wealthy families whose coat-of-arms was unknown a hundred years ago. Luynes alone still belongs to the ancient ducal house which bears its name.

All of these castles, and a hundred smaller ones, down to our small Commanderie, or the toy-castle of La Carte, near Ballan, have a grace and a dignity of their own, untouched by their change of fortunes. Fallen from their antique state, they appear to own the power of ennobling their possessors. And as the sea-shell models to its form the wandering fish that dwells in it by choice, so these old houses, representing an ideal annihilated by frequent revolutions, have silently refashioned the sort of aristocracy for which they were created. Their ancient walls can find no great change between the present and the past. To make the resemblance all the closer, there has arisen during the last few years in France, especially since the Dreyfus trial, a semblance of civil strife, and, as it were, a shadow of those wars of religion with which these old stones are so familiar. And if as yet no Huguenot gentlemen dangle anew from the iron balconies of Amboise, it is perhaps from no want of a will to string them there on the part of their orthodox neighbours.

Life in any of these chateaux, on either side of the abyss, is much the same; indeed, much the same life has been led in rural France by the upper classes since the very days of the Roman Empire. The letters of Ausonius, written in the fourth century; or the Victorial of Don Pero Niño, a Spanish knight who visited a castle in Normandy some thousand years later; each alike present a picture which varies in no essential point from that which we behold in any important country house to-day.

The letters of Ausonius introduce us to the brilliant villas that adorned in Gallo-Roman times the banks of the Garonne —villas that were rather *palazzi*, as they say in Italy to-day,

with their picture-galleries, libraries, bath-rooms, and loggias adorned with statues. Round them extended noble gardens, like the gardens of Versailles or St. Cloud, with artificial lakes and canals, clipped yews in figures, rows of marble busts, and some little sunproof grove of ilex, where Pan for ever plays a flute grown green with moss. Just as in our days, the farm adjoined the villa, with its rick-yards and sheepfolds, its barns, stables, and winepress. But if the outer form of things was little different, still more striking is the social resemblance. Then, as now, the men of the household rose early for a morning's hunting before the mid-day meal; visitors called after lunch, partook of a light refreshment, strolled with their hosts about the park and gardens. After their departure, then, as now, guests and hosts alike retired to write their letters. Not every day of old came and went the post, and the missives it brought and took were more studied and wittier than our hasty messages to-day. Then, as now, the upper class in France was passionately fond of music; and that, too, was a resource—the instruments indeed were a little different, being "lyres as big as carts," says Ammianus Marcellinus, and hydraulic organs. But the pleasure and the habit were the same. On most afternoons, some of the guests of a large party were busy with music, or perhaps with the preparations for private theatricals, which then, as now, were a frequent entertainment in a country house: Paulus, of Saintes, brought with him to Lucaniacus a farce of his own composition for the delectation of Ausonius and his guests. While these were occupied in music or reciting, others were driving, or playing at tennis (Paulinus, of Pella, sent to Rome for his tennis-balls), and others, again, were planning some mighty race of cars. To-day they are motor-cars,—and there is all the difference.

After dinner, reading and conversation were the order of

the day. Then, as now, the women were well to the fore. The wife of Ausonius wrote poetry, his daughter attended a course of university lectures, his aunt was a lady doctor. Depend upon it, in any age these clever French women could always hold their own! While some of the hosts of Lucaniacus sat talking round the lamp, others looked through the last new books; more often, some one read aloud to a circle of ladies busy with their needlework: just as to-night! In a quiet corner, dice and trictrac claimed their devotees. Ausonius does not speak of bridge or boston.

Life in the upper class has little changed in Gallia! We find, indeed, a greater difference if we compare our modern round of days and works with the picture offered in the Victorial. In 1406 (as we shall see in a later chapter), the chateau of Sérifontaine was no less hospitable than Lucaniacus, "and as well mounted," says the chronicler, "as any mansion in Paris;" the pleasures of hunting and shooting, the extreme love and exquisite practice of music, the light and almost constant art of conversation were alike in the one as in the other. There is the same delightful courtesy, the same universal amiability of temper. But in the mediæval picture there is, perhaps (with a wilding grace and fantasy, which are not now in fashion), a lack of that sober, solid culture, that fund of judgment and good sense so oddly mixed with triviality, which in the days of Ausonius, as in our own, seem to me distinctive of society in France.

In all the comfortable *bourgeois* houses that I visit, as in the manor of Touraine, life runs as easy, as regular, as if on wheels of clockwork. This same ease and elasticity struck the excellent Don Pedro Niño, of whom more anon. "Could it last for ever," said he, "such as it is, a man would not desire another Paradise." Every one seems pleased and

happy, and I have long since come to the conclusion that the real art, the real wealth of France, are just this universal amiability of temper. Nothing happens, yet every one seems busy and amused. The young people shoot and play tennis of mornings (they still play tennis in France), or ride their bicycles (an evident progress on Lucaniacus!), or mount their horses; the elders write letters, read the papers, stroll in the grounds, eat grapes from the trellis for a morning "cure;" the ladies smile and sit about arrayed in wonderful morning gowns, embroidering strips of mysterious and beautiful needlework. A great capacity for sitting about and smiling, an ability to embroider anything, from a shoe-bag to a set of curtains, is part of the equipment of every well-bred Frenchwoman. Lunch reunites the scattered elements and is rich in animated conversation: gossip, news, discussion, gibes, laughing protests, enthusiastic *envolées*, learned disquisitions, sparkling or ironic repartee, valuable information; for conversation in all its branches is the national game in France, played on all occasions by both sexes (especially together), and they are as clever here, and as easily first, as we in the cricket-field. After lunch the time runs, with scarce a variation, as it ran at Lucaniacus, or at Sérifontaine, save that in the last few years the general adoption of the motor-car has vastly increased the circle of possible visits and excursions. The letters to write, the game of tennis, the stroll in the grounds, the hour of music, remain unchanged. Frenchwomen, as a rule, are far superior at the piano to English-women or Italians; every little circle possesses its musician of considerable merit, and in almost every country house we may be sure of finding at least one lady, reading her music as lightly as her novel, and possessing a vast repertory of symphonies and sonatas which she plays with a just and fine understanding. How

many an enchanted hour will she while away with Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner, César Franck, greatest of modern masters, or, perhaps, the idol of the hour, Claude Debussy!

Even as the dice-tables and trictrac stood ready of old for the guests of Lucaniacus, so in every French country house to-day there is an orgy of innocent card-playing —such mysteries of Chinese bézique, boston, bridge (played any time these dozen years or more in France), or immense and complicated patiences which take five packs of cards. Meanwhile, I sit in a corner, very quiet, lost in a volume of Balzac, and a sweet agèd voice calls to me: "Quelle triste vieillesse vous vous préparez, mon enfant!" Ah, sweet agèd voice that I shall never hear again, your echo rings still for me in all the rooms of the Commanderie!

## VIII

In every French country house of this early twentieth century we shall find, however, one great and noble preoccupation which took but little of the time or expenditure of those earlier societies with which I have compared our contemporaries. The sense of Charity, of social service, of solidarity or fraternity—call it what you will—the intimate feeling of our duty to our neighbour in all his troubles and trials, is a strong moral feature in the life of France to-day. On either side of the political and moral gulf which divides society, the same sentiment exists, with different applications. On the Catholic and royalist side, the most noble sacrifices will be made to support the Sisters in their work of education and nursing, great sums will be given to the Brotherhood of Christian Doctrine or to the Little Sisters of the Poor. The organization of the Catholic Church is

beyond all praise—every charitable impulse of the human heart can find therein its channel, and work the maximum of effect without let or hindrance. On the other side, on *our* side, the canalization is not so perfect. People have to dig their trench and lay their pipes before they can turn on their supplies. A great deal is left to individual effort. Schools, *crèches*, nursing homes, popular colleges, are founded and supported with a passion, a constant sacrifice, which has in it, with the dignity of charity, all the enthusiasm of a noble sport. How happy were the world if well-doing should become the pastime and the passion of the future!

My friends of the Commanderie have founded and endowed a cottage hospital, a perfect model of cheerfulness and hygiene. With its wide windows, its inner gallery for walking, its charming white bedrooms, its cane armchairs and sofas set about in the garden, whence the woods and vines are always fair to see, with its friendly Sisters in their white *cornettes*, and its mild fresh air, the *Hospitalité* of Ballan appears, less a place to be ill in, than most evidently a place to get well in. There is an operating theatre (as bright and speckless as the rest) with a private bedroom for paying guests: and this is by no means the least service rendered, for the farmers of Touraine, well off and independent, are wholly without provision in their homes for the weeks which follow, for instance, the necessary infliction of any large flesh wound: too often in their homes the microbe finds out that open door. In the winter and spring, when pneumonia and influenza work their will, the little hospital can contain some ten or eleven invalids. It is emptied in the warm summer months, and serves, when there are no sick in Ballan, as a convalescent home for many a worn-out shop-girl or dressmaker's apprentice from Paris.

Sometimes, in that little hospital, I see a vision of social peace which still seems too far removed from this lovely, humane, courteous, beneficent, and yet, in so far as politics are concerned (and here religion is a branch of politics), this most choleric and disputatious land of France. Built and endowed by a Jewess, visited and approved by the Archbishop of Tours, its white dormitories show the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Socialist doctor standing hand-in-hand round the bedside of the sick. "Ah me!" say I, "might I live to see the day when the whole of France should imitate this manor in Touraine!" But history tells me that (in France, at least) the lion will never lie down with the lamb —for at heart the lion is afraid lest its neighbour take advantage of the situation.

# THE FRENCH PEASANT

## BEFORE AND SINCE THE REVOLUTION

# THE FRENCH PEASANT, BEFORE AND SINCE THE REVOLUTION

THE first time we meet him, to my knowledge, is just about the end of the twelfth century. Who can forget the sombre figure that strides across the dainty scene of *Aucassin et Nicolette?* Aucassin, on his courser, dreamy and lost in thought, goes riding towards the greenwood to find his true love, Nicolette. At the edge of the forest he passes the little herdboys, sitting on their mantles on the grass, as they break bread at nones by the fountain's edge. These are mere children. It is far later, when the sun is sinking, while the tears course down the callow cheeks of Aucassin at the thought of his poor strayed love still unfound, it is deep in the forest glades that he meets the real French peasant.

"Right down an old green path rode Aucassin. He looked before him and saw such a varlet as this. Tall was he and wondrous foul of feature; he had a great shock of coal-black hair; his eyes were a full palm's breadth apart. Large was his jowl, flat his great nose, with a broad nostril, and his thick lips were redder than roast meat; yellow and unsightly were the teeth of him. Shod was he with hose and shoon of oxhide, gartered a little lower than the knee with swathes of lime bark; and he was wrapped in a great coarse cloak that seemed to have two wrong sides to it.

He stood there, leaning on a club; and he was sore afraid when he marked Aucassin riding towards him.

"'Now God be with you, fair brother,' said Aucassin.

"'God bless you,' replied the peasant hind.

"'And what do you here, for the love of God?' said Aucassin.

"'What's that to you?' said the other.

"'Nothing,' said Aucassin. 'I spoke out of courtesy.'

"'But you,' said the peasant—'why do you weep and go so sad and sorry? Were I as rich a man as you, naught in this world should make me shed a tear!'

"'Bah! Do you know who I am?' said Aucassin.

"'Yes. You are Aucassin, the count's son. And look here, an' you'll tell why you go thus a-weeping, I'll tell you this business of mine.'

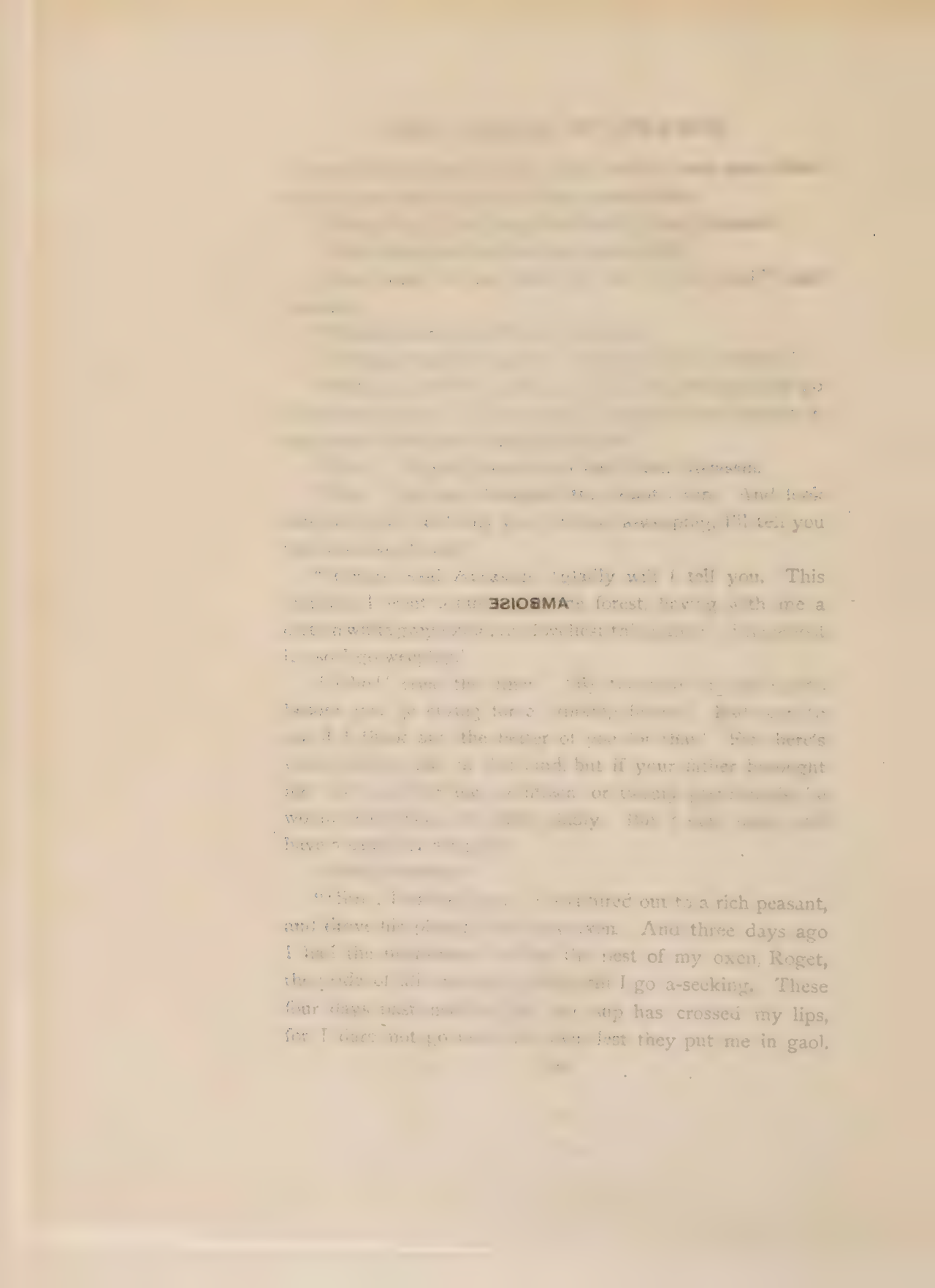
"'Certes,' said Aucassin; 'gladly will I tell you. This morning I went a-hunting in the forest, having with me a certain white greyhound, the loveliest thing alive. I have lost it; so I go weeping.'

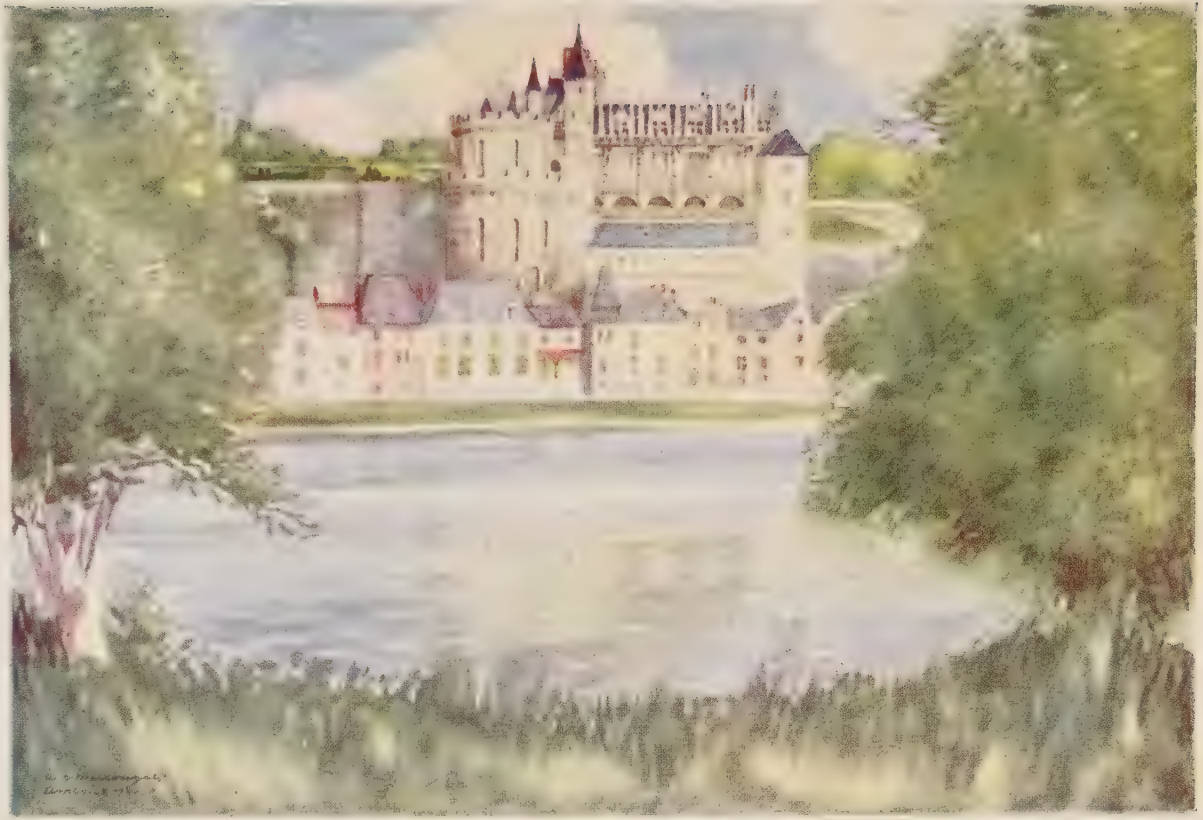
"'Oho!' cried the other. 'By the heart in the Lord's bosom, you go crying for a stinking hound! Bad scan to me if I think any the better of you for that! Fie, there's not so rich a man in this land, but if your father besought him for a gift of ten, or fifteen, or twenty greyhounds, he would send them you right gladly. But *I* may weep, and have a cause for weeping.'

"'Why, brother?'

"'Sire; I will tell you. I was hired out to a rich peasant, and drove his plough with four oxen. And three days ago I had the misfortune to lose the best of my oxen, Roget, the pride of all my team, which still I go a-seeking. These four days past, neither bite nor sup has crossed my lips, for I dare not go near the town lest they put me in gaol.

AMBOISE





Make good the loss I cannot, for I have nothing of my own save the clothes I stand up in. And a weary mother have I, and all she owned was a mattress, which they have taken from under her, so she lies on the bare straw. And that's what irks me most of all! For havings come and go. To-day I've lost all. Some other day I might hope to win it back again, and pay for my lost ox, all in good time. I'ld not waste a tear on the business, were it not for my mother. And you weep for a stinking dog! Bad scan to me if I think any the better of ye for that.'

"'Here is speech of good comfort, fair brother!' said Aucassin. 'Good luck to you. And how much might your ox be worth?'

"'Sire, they ask twenty sols for the price of it, and I've not one farthing to the good.'

"'Now look,' said Aucassin; 'here is the money in my purse; take it and pay the fine.'

"'Sire, many thanks. And may you find the thing you go a-seeking——'"

Were I writing in French, I should make no apology for this long quotation; in French the poem of Aucassin is little known beyond the narrow circle of Romance philologists. *Habent sua fata libelli.* In England the magic touch of a man of genius has rested for one moment on this mediæval page, leaving it glorious and public. Of late, those gentlemen of learned leisure, who once translated Horace, then Dante, have divided their activity between the Rubaiyàt of Omar Khayyam and this same quaint *chante-fable* of Aucassin and Nicolette, of which there are several excellent English versions. But let the reader consider the passage we have roughly and literally rendered from Suchier's edition, not as a literary exercise, but as a plain statement of fact: a portrait of the French peasant,

grotesquely faithful, and even to-day a speaking likeness. Observe the shock of black curling hair, the large nose, the broad jowl, the lips thick and ruddy, the stalwart frame; just such may be seen at any fair in Southern or Central France. Doubtless the anonymous author did not draw from life; he lived in an age of convention, and simply took the canon of ugliness; since, to him and his contemporaries, beauty resided only in a tender fairness, slenderness to the point of tenuity, long narrow eyes, slim lips, a neat straight nose, and a delicate pallor flushed with pink. But this is merely removing the picture from reality by one degree. To the *cantor's* world of the Middle Ages, the common was unclean, the vulgar ugly, the popular type a thing of repulsion. They confused the idea of comeliness and the idea of race. They admired only the rare. And this peasant had perforce to be all that our Prince Charming so obviously was not—swarthy, squat, red-lipped, hard-featured, rude, and a bit of a poltroon—so that he becomes a living image of his fellows employed in ploughing the glebe or hoeing the vineyard.

With what an airy touch our old poet has disengaged the different ideals of prince and peasant. They are as true to-day as yesterday. Aucassin, with his facile courtesy, his gentle grace, has none the less that fund of quiet reserve which marks distinction: "Certainly, good brother, I will tell you what I seek. I have lost my white greyhound, the loveliest thing alive." He speaks in a parable, and the secret of his heart remains a fountain sealed: nothing is so vulgar as indiscretion. The peasant, on the contrary, is a churl, with all the quick suspicion of a churl. "Mind your own business," is his first word of greeting. And yet how swiftly he slides into confidence and a free-and-easy *camaraderie!* He has none of Aucassin's delicate

dissembling. Each of these men is heart-broken for the sufferings of a woman dependent upon him. But Aucassin goes dreaming of his lost betrothed rapt in an ideal of disinterestedness, poetry, and chivalry; while the hind knows what it costs to bring up a child, and has often seen his mother go hungry in order to give him a second bowl of pottage, so that he cherishes the broken old woman who, for his sake, lies on the bare straw. "A weary mother had I" (*une lasse mère avoie*). Even to-day, in a French village, such an old, capable, worn-out mother is often the dearest romance of the peasant's life.

The "vallet" of *Aucassin* was probably the ploughman of some *métayer* or peasant farmer on the system of half profits, equally divided between landlord and tenant. In such a case, the lost ox being part of the *cheptel*, or capital, of the farm, and so belonging to the landlord, would have to be immediately replaced; it was certainly undervalued at twenty sols—which, in purchasing power, represent about four pounds of our money. If the peasant cannot pay his fine, he must e'en take to the woods for an outlaw, like Robin Hood and his merry men. But probably he would not stay there long. From forest to forest, as stealthily as a weasel or a mole, he will put half the length of France between him and his disgrace, hire himself out to some other farmer, lay by, glean, go a-faggoting, and some day, when a good season has filled the barns, byres, vats, and pockets of all the country-side, he will offer his old master the price of his lost ox, and purchase of the king a free pardon, duly paid for. The *Lettres de Rémission* of Charles V. and Charles VI. are full of such instances.

The poetic gamut of the Middle Ages was restricted. Few things were deemed worthy of immortality in verse. The anger of Achilles and all worthy knights; heroic deeds

by flood and field: or else the coming of spring; the revolt of young wives against their tyrant; love, especially unlawful; or strange adventures and the subtleties of dire enchantment; the dire revenge of the *jaloux*, the injured husband; or the foul end of the traitor in the camp. These are fit subjects for song and story, especially when they pass in a world above the common, a world where Aucassin, Lord of Beaucaire, and Nicolette, Princess of Carthage, belong, indeed, by right of birth, but where a mere swarthy peasant is out of place. The mediæval poets thought, with Dr. Johnson, that "in the case of a Countess, the imagination is more excited." Once or twice a countryman lounges across the stage of some *fabliau*, generally in comic guise. In the "Lai de l'Oiselet," for instance, we find a spirited caricature of the rich peasant, who has purchased house and lands; he inhabits, indeed, a gentleman's ancient manor, but he has not been able to buy the title-deeds of gentlehood, in mien, and speech, and thought. The very birds in his boughs make mock of him, for the Middle Ages were ever bitter on that sore subject of new men and old acres. Besides these caricatures, we come across a few weaving songs for women, and certain *caroles*, or glees and catches for dancing in a ring, such as still enliven the songs and dances which have always been so pleasant a feature in the rural life of France. But save for such rare waifs and strays, we must let slip a century and a half ere, quitting Aucassin, we find again a mention of the peasant in French literature. And this time he stands before us redoubtable, insurgent, a murderer.

## II

Be sure we see him at his worst, for his chronicler, Froissart, was somewhat intolerant of the common sort, and ever at heart a contemptor of the mob. He thought it "*grand' pitié et dommage quand méchantes gens sont au-dessus des vaillants hommes*" (translate: "when the lower classes are set above their betters"), nor deemed that any provocation could warrant open mutiny. Yet even Froissart owns that the peasants' rising was not without some sort of an excuse, while the Monk of St. Denis (a liberal soul) writes: "They could no longer support the ills which oppressed them, and seeing that their lords, far from defending them, used them worse than their enemies, the peasants thought they had a right to rebel, taking their vengeance into their own hands." Here, as nearly always in the history of France, a tacit breach of contract is the root of revolution. Let the nobles live on their lands, defend them in wartime, cultivate them in time of peace, and the peasants will submit to tax, and *corvée*, to insult and injury, and scarcely murmur. But woe to the coward, and 'ware the absentee.

After the victory of the English at Poitiers, an outburst of patriotic anger and revolt (such as in our own days produced the Commune) brought about the Jacquerie. The peasant was born to plough and reap, he ploughed and reaped; the noble was made to fight and conquer; if he fought and could not conquer—worse still if he could not fight—he was a tare in the wheat, useless, noxious, to be cast to the burning. While the nobles of France were captive in the English camp, the defenceless country-sides of the North were pillaged and ruined. And the farmers

and labourers rose in their wrath, declaring that their masters "honnissoient et trahissoient le royaume de France;" and so, says Froissart, they passed sentence of death upon them. A certain Guillaume Caillet led the mob; his nickname, Jacques Bonhomme, has stuck to the French peasant ever since. Soon he had a following of a hundred thousand men as fierce, ignorant, untrained as a hundred thousand gorillas, and great were their excesses. Froissart can scarce contain his horror, and still more his wonder, at the exploits of "les vilains, noirs and petits, et très mal armés." It is true that, at the time, most of the men of the ruling class, of an age to fight, were absent. The Jacques made bonfires of more than sixty castles. Three hundred ladies and damsels—as pitiable as our own grandmothers at Delhi—escaped their loathly embraces, and fled across country into the town of Meaux, where they took refuge in the market. How the King of Navarre and the Count of Foix rode across France to their relief; killing the villainous Jacques "in great heaps, like beasts;" hunting them down, in a battue; driving them into the Marne to drown; burning wholesale them and their villages; and finally setting free unharmed the hapless, happy dames of Meaux:—All this, is it not written in the chronicles of Froissart?

## III

Despite this direful vengeance at the end of it, the Jacquerie had left the French peasant conscious of his force. He had learned that nobles are mortal men and can perish by fire, scythe-cut, or blow of club as certainly as Jacques himself. Henceforth, let them respect his women and his

horned cattle! Jacques Bonhomme is, on the whole, a patient fellow. Let the nobles do their duty, and keep their hands off his wife, his daughter and his herds, and it is astounding what he will submit to: exactions growing year by year, and *corvées* such as a decadent fancy may invent. He will beat the moats all night when my lady is lying in, lest the croaking of the frogs disturb her delicate slumbers. Only let my lord keep to his part of the bargain, and respect Jacques Bonhomme's womankind and those two white oxen in his stall, those—

"Deux grands bœufs blancs marqués de roux,"

which (as Pierre Dupont, who knew him well, declares) the French peasant, although no bad husband, still holds a little dearer than his wife. The murders recorded in the *Lettres de Rémission*, as committed by the labourer upon the persons of his betters, are nearly always caused by rape or cattle raids. On such occasions these "misérables personnes et gens de labeur" have ever shown themselves capable of a desperate courage; on such occasions the "croquant" does not fear to raise his club of greenwood, and dust the embroidered jacket of his liege lord, even to risk of that noble life and damage of those seigneurial limbs, as it happened to François Rabault, Seigneur d'Ivay. Sometimes, more legally, he appeals to the justice of my Lord Governor of the province, drawing down condign punishment on the head of the noble offender; indeed, the ravisher of at least one village beauty was condemned to death by the Courts of Bordeaux. More than once, for such reasons, some Lovelace of a country gentleman has had his manor sacked or even burned; as may be seen in the vast manuscript treasure of the *Lettres de Rémission;* in those printed by the care of M. Douët d'Arcq; and in a new

and charming volume: "Gentilhommes Campagnards de l'Ancienne France," by M. Pierre de Vaissière.

The village Hampden flourishes in France, where Jacques has always had a keen sense of his rights. Ever since the Romans bent their stubborn shoulders, still unwilling, beneath the yoke, this same independent race of hardy crofters has never ceased to dream—if not of liberty, in the magnificent, imaginative, political sense—at least of freedom, of standing up in one's own plot of ground (though not in one's province) master of one's fate. Centuries before the French Revolution, the first dim forebodings of it were already taking shape in the slow brains of these Croquants, Pastoreaux, Jacques, or Gauthiers. From the sands of Sologne or the plains of Brie, but more especially from the Celtic mountains of the Morvan and Auvergne, ever and anon they would rush in eruption, like an old volcanic force still untamed, destroying the superficial civilization of the aristocratic world. But more often the volcano slept in peace. The peasant asked for little here below.

On the whole, we may say that, from the end of the Hundred Years' War till the middle of the sixteenth century, the peasant lived on excellent terms with his masters, fairly prosperous and passably content. The nobles of those times dwelt in their villages, dealing "basse et moyenne justice," punishing petty offences, redressing minor wrongs, settling the quarrels of neighbours, sending a good soup to the sick, relieving the necessitous, cultivating their own lands, not themselves too far removed from the humble interests of the soil, and yet, none the less, examples of a broader life, an ampler culture to the poor at their gates. Even so in his manor dwelt Michel Eyquem, Lord of Montaigne; and if the ordinary country gentleman was more often as simple of spirit as noble of birth, and

sometimes even brutal and violent, he appears on the whole to have been a fairly good landlord. Foreign visitors to France marvel at his attachment to the soil. "The nobles in France," writes Soranzo, the Venetian ambassador in 1558,—"and this style of 'noble' comprises alike the gentry and the prince—do not dwell in the large towns, but in their villages, where their castles stand."

Living on their lands and reaping the profit of them, the French gentry and their peasants under them became notable husbandmen. The end of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries saw endless forests reclaimed, marshes drained, and fields of wheat flourishing in place of the scrub oak and the rush. Claude de Seyssel estimates the land under cultivation, during the reign of Louis XII., at one-third of the kingdom; and, in 1565, J. Bodin writes: "Depuis cent ans on a défrichi un infini de forêts et de landes." Peace reigned abroad, activity at home, masters and men were animated by the same interests; if one of our country gentlemen goes to war or to Court, be sure his letters will be full, not of details of the king's glory, but rather of instructions to those at home that they forget not to gather the stones from the fields, hoe the barley, turn the hay, weed the kitchen garden, prune the trees, shear the sheep, and steep the hemp. And, as soon as possible, he rides home again, his head already full of the price he must pay his harvesters, of the coming cattle-fair, the building of the new barn by the five-acre field, and the salting of the pork he is wont to despatch for sale to a certain worthy Thomas Quatorze, in Paris. As yet the landed gentry and the peasants have the same interests and pre-occupations.

The blot on the landscape is the excess of feudal rights. Even by the first years of the sixteenth century these had

become excessive, and astounded the wisest traveller of that age. What does Erasmus say in his *Adages?*

"Open your purse and pay, for you enter a port; pay, for you cross a bridge; pay, for you need the ferry-boat. And what is the reason of all these taxes which pare down the poor man's crust? There's a tax for the carrying of the harvest, a tax when the corn goes to the mill, a tax on the baking of bread. Give half your vintage to my Lord for the right of putting the other half in cask. There's no selling a colt or an ass without settling the rights of the fisc." Erasmus, not given to mincing matters, calls the great nobles a set of disgraceful harpies, *harpiis istis scelaratissimis.*" And yet, despite the truth and blackness of this picture, owing to the force of a similar life and habits, owing also to a kindly social instinct in the race, the French country gentleman—and even the great noble—was a prosperous, honourable, and useful member of society, so long as he lived on his lands and served the State, within the boundaries of his own parish, as captain of militia and justice of the peace He began to degenerate when the king, jealous of the authority of the landed gentry, invented a regular army, which soon usurped the place of the feudal volunteers; and established a regular magistrature, in which the country squire had neither part nor lot. Unaccustomed to his enforced idleness, he found provincial life intolerably dull, and soon began to sell a farm or two, and set out for Versailles. Quite early in the seventeenth century the rural exodus has begun, and the country cousins come trooping to Fontainebleau and Versailles from their deserted villages. The court, the army attract these noble sons of the soil as a candle the moth. The highly centralized government of the Kings Louis—XIII., XIV., XV., and XVI., of the name—draws to the court all the resources of France, and disposes at

Versailles of all advancement and favour. St. Simon goes so far as to accuse the king of augmenting the splendour of his court with a view to sapping the independence of his nobles: "La cour devient un manège de la politique du despotisme—le roi vent épuiser tout le monde et le réduire peu à peu a dépendre entièrement de ses bienfaits." So the old manors were forgotten; an agent took the rent that paid for the laced coats at court; the fields became marsh and forest again, and my lord thought no longer of shearing his sheep and hoeing his corn, but of serving his majesty in the army, or in the palace of Versailles. For here also—

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

And no man in the kingdom was so unenviable as that honest country gentleman, faithful to his father's fields, of whom, on mention of his name, the king would say, with cold disapproval: "Je ne le vois jamais." In this connection, it is instructive to read the memoirs of that martinet of courtiers, St. Simon, and the letters of Madame de Sévigné (that admirable country squire), who wrote to her daughter: "J'aime mieux parfois lire un compte de fermier que les Contes de La Fontaine."

Absolute monarchy was the ruin of the French peasant; or at least it was his *moral* ruin; for the absence of his lord, while depriving him of his one glimpse into a world a little larger than his own, was sometimes incidentally the occasion of enlarging Jacques Bonhomme's narrow field. My lord spent a terrible deal at Versailles. Dress, play, an outfit for the wars, soon ran away with the income of parental inheritance. Often enough the agent had to sell (and pretty much for what it would fetch) a strip of meadow here, a spinney there. Now, while my lord was always spending, the peasant, on the other hand, was in a peculiarly favourable position for

saving. Money scarcely ever left his horny grasp. He paid his rent chiefly in kind, stock, *corvées*, and quit-rents of one sort or another; but he sold his cattle and crops for coin, at the fair, and put the treasured sols and livres in some safe place behind the rafter or beneath the hearthstone. The *corvée* was the making of the peasant: pure profit, as he thought, since he only paid in sweat and sinew, instead of lessening his hoard of secret silver. He mowed his lord's meadows, mended his roads, carried his grist, and wood, and fodder, lent his cart and horse for transport, worked on the estate so many days a month with nary a penny of wage, was harassed, hampered, overworked, if you like; but the *corvée* was a form of rent, and the form his soul preferred. In exchange he had his cot and his fields, the right to fatten his porkers in the oakwood, the right to pasture his cow on the grassy edges of the lane, the right of gleaning his master's corn in the fields, his faggots in the forest, and also the dried beech-leaves which stuffed his bed, and foddered his kine. Every *corvée* brought him in some specific advantage; so that, while his masters were running a break-neck race to ruin at Court, Jacques Bonhomme was buying, out of their parental acres, here a strip of rye and there a cabbage-patch: inconsiderable snippets of land scattered here and there, up and down the country-side, presenting no importance to the eye, but representing a small estate increasing with every generation. Jacques' grandson may be Georges Dandin, even as the great-grandsire of my Lord, perhaps, may have been the wealthy boor of the "Lai de l'Oiselet." The seventeenth century has little but mockery for the peasant-parvenu who marries the squire's daughter, yet their son, ennobled by the mother's gentlehood (for there are many houses *où le ventre anoblit*), may carry arms and be a gentleman. Even without this

maternal warrant, there are short cuts to rank; for the snob is of no generation or society, but pan-endemic, so to speak, in all highly civilized centres. Does not Madame de Sévigné paint for us a certain little Lord "who is all honey, especially to dukes and peers"? Does not Molière show us his Arnolphe, who ennobles himself with scant ado and calls himself M. de la Souche?

"Et d'un vieux tronc pourri de votre métairie
Vous faites dans le monde un nom de seigneurie.
. . . . . .
Je sais un paysan qu'on appelait Gros-Pierre,
Qui, n'ayant pour tout bien qu'un seul quartier de terre,
Y fit tout à l'entour faire un fossé bourbeux
Et de Monsieur de l'Isle en prit le nom pompeux."

## IV

While Molière shows us the peasant growing fat on the fruits of his master's recklessness and absence, La Bruyère, with his profound and moral vision of things, reveals the other face of absenteeism: the diminished standard of virtue, decency, comfort, in the deserted villages; the peasants sinking almost to the condition of savages, spending nothing on themselves, and living only in one thought—how to save enough to buy another rood of land. Meanwhile the soil itself, ill cultivated, and prized by its absent owners merely as a game-preserve or an investment, was soon overgrown with rush and bramble, and returned to marsh or bog or forest, as of old. Few spectacles can have been more harrowing to the social or moral eye than the French villages of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

"There be certain fierce and shy wild animals, male and female, which are scattered up and down our country-side.

They are sunburned to a sort of dull black, and walk bent towards the earth they delve; on straightening themselves, they show, it is true, a human face, and, in fact, they are men and women; they withdraw from the fields at nightfall to their dens, where they sup on black bread, roots, and water. They spare their fellow-men the labours of seed-time and harvest, and do not deserve to lack the bread they sow."

Could Swift have exhaled more generously his *sæva indignatio?* La Bruyère, the deepest and tenderest mind of his generation, was therefore a man of wrath. "Seizures for debt, and the bailiff's man in the house, the removal of furniture distrained, prisons, punishment, tortures, all these things may be just and legal. But what I can never see without the renewal of astonishment is the ferocity of man to man."

But especially was La Bruyère a man of wrath when his mind's eye fell on rural France. The Italian and Spanish travellers of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, who showed themselves so sensible to the charm of country life in France, would no longer, could they have revisited the scene, have found the least occasion for their praises. The nobles of France no longer dwelt in their castles, among their peasants, protecting the village at their gates; and our philosopher wonders how lords, who might have lodged at home in a spacious palace, with a suite for the summer planned to the north, and winter quarters open to the sun, should count themselves happy to lie in a miserable entresol at the Louvre, with scarce a closet for their wives to receive their guests in. During the eternal round from Paris to Versailles, Versailles to Marly, Marly to Fontainebleau, and thence to Paris, what time has my lord to think of the hundred poor households whose labours bring in his hundred thousand livres of revenue? An agent collects the rents;

and if the peasant be too poor to light a fire in winter, within sight of my lord's forests; if he go clad in a sheepskin or a ragged sack; if he go without bread to eat—be sure it's not the fault of my lord Duke. He is the kindest soul alive. He has not the slightest wish to oppress his tenants. He has only forgotten them! "And is not all this a presage for the future?" breaks off La Bruyère.

Again and again he reiterates his warning, finding something unnatural and shocking in the complete divorce between town and country. Scarce a man at court could tell a flax plant from hemp, or wheat from barley—don't speak to them of fallow fields or aftermath, of laying down a vine or of marking a young tree fit for the axe: "provignage" and "baliveau" are no longer French, it seems. If, once in a way, on the occasion of a hunting party or a Royal progress, my lord duke proceeds to the home of his ancestors, and decides to open his purse-strings and spend money on the place, be sure he has some fine scheme for an avenue right through the heart of the forest, or a terrace raised on arcades with an orangery, or a fountain with a piece of artificial water which he takes the village brooks to feed. But reclaim a marsh, clear a wood, rebuild the tenants' cottages? Never! These be pursuits for rustics. Nay, cries La Bruyère, and we hear the tears in his prophetic voice: "Rendre un cœur content, combler une âme de joie, prévenir d'extrêmes besoins ou y remédier?—la curiosité des grands ne s'étend pas jusque là!"

Immured in the circle of their own delights and interests, the nobles of France had lost touch with the peasants. The country, to please them, must be all in moor and forest, good for game; and the fertile plains of Brie are less to their fancy than the wastes of Champagne. They would turn the crofters from a sheeprun to make room for the

deer. The landlord's house stands untenanted, though now and then he may use a shooting-box. And if in his old age (after twenty, thirty, forty years of hard service) the old soldier, the disgraced or disillusioned courtier, should haply retire to his paternal acres, too often he finds them weed-grown and desolate, the manor half in ruins, the turret and pigeon-cote tumbling about his ears. He no longer knows by sight the peasants on the estate; he has lost his taste for the land; and the first wet season sends him packing, if he can. Meanwhile, in his abandoned village, Jacques Bonhomme—whose landlord is no longer the friend, protector, justice of the peace, but just a tom-fool in a laced coat, who cannot tell a blade of wheat when he sees it—Jacques Bonhomme continues to starve, to sweat, to diddle my lord's agent, to curb his back to the blow and his heart to the sod, to suffer, labour, spare, till his stocking is full of hard-earned pence and pounds; till his mind is a wilderness of savage and sordid squalor, without an idea, an ideal, nay, a hope or a feeling, beyond the land. What wonder if the son of the rich peasant be so often the vulgar parvenu we meet in Molière and Marivaux? Rather let us marvel that sometimes he turns out a capable man, soldier or statesman, who quits the glebe to save his country. But a Colbert, for instance, or even a Georges Dandin, is no longer a French peasant. Let us return to our sheep and their shepherds.

## V

A hundred years later than La Bruyère, in 1787, another generous mind, another traveller of liberal views, less profound than the French philosopher, yet accurate, alert, and well-informed: brief, an English country gentleman—

CHENONCEAUX

protector, justice of the peace
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it—Jacques Bonhomme
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CHENONCEAUX
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Bruyère, in 1787, another
traveller of liberal views, less
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English country gentleman—

a certain Mr. Arthur Young, of Bradfield Hall, Suffolk—was to visit the provinces of France and to give us his impressions of the French peasant. Arthur Young, like his forerunner, is a man of feeling. The social state of the poor preoccupies him no less than the condition of French agriculture, which was the original cause of his journey. Great is his wrath against the noble absentees who neglect the lands which their extravagance exhausts. For still Versailles, like some deep-rooted ulcer, absorbs and corrupts the forces of France; and the noble continues to spend the revenues of a farm on the lace and ribbons of a coat, or to turn out a country-side of crofters in order to enlarge a deer forest. Of late a new fashion had indeed revived the prestige of the long-neglected country-house. Two writers —Rousseau and the elder Mirabeau—had expressed perhaps, rather than directed, a movement of reaction; people began to think again of the life of the fields, of country pleasures, and country freedom. So Arthur Young shows us a France where many of the great nobles were agriculturists; the mode, says he, obliges the great of the earth to spend a summer month or two in rusticating at their rural seats; the Queen has a dairy-farm at Trianon; milkmaids and shepherds are the rage. The Duke of Larochefoucauld-Liancourt shares Young's enthusiasm for turnips, and His Grace's sister-in-law is no less passionate for luzern, of which, says Young, she grew more than any other person in Europe: "What was my surprise at finding this young Viscountess a great farmer!" No subject in France was then more modish than the rotation of crops. And no doubt even this superficial contact between the noble and Nature, the peasant and his landlord, was better than an absolute divorce; only it came too late. Both the noble and the peasant had deteriorated during the two centuries that they have lived apart. On the

one hand, the careless selfishness of the cavalier; on the other, a rancorous squalor, a sordid if sometimes a servile disrespect. The "foppery and nonsense" of the country gentry struck Arthur Young no less painfully than the folly of those "glittering beings of Versailles," to whose fine coats the well-being and decency of rural France were sacrificed. There were, no doubt, in the number of them a fair percentage of good landlords, just and coarse, proud and poor, such as M. Pierre de Vaissière shows us in his recent volume, "Les Gentilhommes Campagnards," and a few great souls, like Liancourt. But an honourable and mediocre minority could not suffice to heal the breach, widened by centuries of absence, which divided peasant from landlord.

The new-fangled residence of the rich in their summer seats did, as a rule, but little to ameliorate the condition of their poorer neighbours. Too often, the peasants to them were as the pigs, for whom a sty is all sufficient. Our English gentleman-farmer pauses at Combourg, the old patrimonial hall of Chateaubriand, at that time a youth under twenty, occupied with his earliest literary efforts. This is how the historic manor of René's father strikes the owner of Bradfield Hall:—

"One of the most brutal, filthy places that can be seen: mud houses, no windows, and a broken pavement. Yet here is a château, and inhabited. Who is this Mons. de Chateaubriand, the owner, that has nerves strung for a residence amidst such filth and poverty? . . . Below this hideous heap of wretchedness is a fine lake, surrounded by well-wooded inclosures." Nor is this an isolated instance. Everywhere in France he tells the same tale—"the poor people seem poor indeed!"—"what a vice is it, and even a crime that the gentry, instead of being the cherishers and

benefactors of their poor neighbours, should thus, by the abomination of feudal rights, prove mere tyrants."

Thus the landlord's summer residence on this estate was too often merely a convenience to himself and no advantage to the tenantry. He went home to wear out his old clothes, to consume the produce of his lands, to economize more or less sordidly for a forthcoming burst of splendour at Versailles. The only country luxury he cared for was the game-preserve or the deer-forest. In many districts the peasants might not weed or hoe their crops lest they disturb the young partridges; nor manure their lands near the forest, lest the flavour of the game be impaired; nor mow their hay before a certain date, however favourable the season; nor plough the stubble after harvest, lest they ruin the shelter of the young birds. Should the wild boar or the deer quit their native glades, and take to the fields, destroying the farmer's crops, he might not shoot them or do them any injury. Such things, in any country, demand a revolution. Says Arthur Young: "Great lords love too much an environ of forest, boars, and huntsmen, instead of marking their residence by the accompaniment of neat and well-cultivated farms, clean cottages, and happy peasants." Had the nobles planted turnips on the waste heaths and moors, there might (he thought) have been no Reign of Terror.

The feudal privileges of the French nobles seemed as shocking and unnatural to our free-born English squire as, early in the sixteenth century, they had appeared to Erasmus. The privileged classes were exempt from all taxation, of which the burden fell chiefly on the humbler sort. The *corvées* had originally been a convenient exchange of service between master and man—so much toil for so much land or so much protection, or so many specified perquisites and privileges; but they had degenerated into a tyrannous abuse,

enforced with endless fines and quit-rents. The poor farmer or cotter had to manage countless payments of so many fowls, so much butter, so much corn, so much transport, due to the landlord; mend the manorial roads and weirs; pay death-duties and marriage-dues; submit to the servitude of employing only the manorial mill, the manorial winepress, the manorial baking-oven. Moreover, in addition to all this (which was, in fact, his rent paid in kind and labour), the peasant of the eighteenth century was abusively charged a fixed and heavy rent in coin. In this way he paid twice over for his miserable cabin and few acres of land; while, as time went on, fresh *corvées—corvées* by custom, *corvées* by usage of the fief, *corvées* by seigneurial decree, and servitudes of every sort, complicated his intolerable condition. No wonder that Jacques Bonhomme began to murmur and, in his dim slow way, to meditate the possibility of a change.

On the 12th of July, 1787, our kind apostle of turnips was walking up a long hill near Chalons in order to relieve his tired beast, and, so walking, was joined by a woman of the people, with whom he entered into conversation. She began, as is the manner of her sort, to complain of hard times, and said that France was indeed a most distressful country. This woman at no great distance might have been taken for sixty or seventy, so bent was her figure, her face so furrowed and roughened by labour in the fields. "Demanding her reasons, she said that her husband had but a morsel of land, one cow, and a poor little horse; yet they had a *franchar* of wheat (about 42 lbs.) and three chickens to pay as a quit-rent to one seigneur, and four *franchars* of oats, one chicken and a sol to pay to another, besides very heavy *tailles* and other taxes. She had seven children, and the cow's milk helped to make the soup.

"'But why, instead of a horse, do you not keep another cow?'

"'Oh, her husband could not carry his produce so well without a horse, and asses are little used in the country. It was said at present,' she went on, 'that something was to be done by some great folks for the poor, but she did not know how or who. But God send us better, *car les tailles et les droits nous écrasent.*'"

And these words recall to our minds another picture—that of the family of humble peasants whose furniture is seized, who are turned out of house and home by the king's officers, in Laclos' *Liaisons Dangereuses* "par ce qu'elle ne pouvoit payer la taille." Valmont, that worse Don Juan, in order to seduce the chaste and lovely Présidente de Tourvel, essays the talisman of virtue. By stealth, to all appearance (and yet well aware that he is followed) he hurries to the rescue, reaching the woodland village at the very moment when the peasants, in silent yet indignant groups, witness their neighbour's eviction.

"Je fais venir le Collecteur; et cédant à ma généreuse compassion, je paye noblement cinquante-six livres (about £2 4*s*.) pour lesquelles on réduisit cinq personnes à la paille et au désespoir. Quelles larmes de reconnaissance coulaient des yeux du vieux chef de cette famille et embellissaient cette figure de Patriarche qu'un moment auparavant l'empreinte farouche du désespoir rendait vraiment hideuse! . . . J'ai senti en moimême un mouvement involontaire mais délicieux; et j'ai été étonné du plaisir qu'on éprouve en faisant le bien."

Here, good reader, is a companion picture to Aucassin and his driver of a team.

Yet, even before '89, the French peasant was, most often, a merry lout. For, by nature, the blood of a Frenchman runs

an alert and mirthful course, so that he takes advantage of the least excuse for cheerfulness. The Duke of Larochefoucauld-Liancourt, that virtuous Revolutionary, was exiled from his country by the Reign of Terror because, although a Revolutionary, he was a Duke; standing among the fields of free America in the harvest month of 1793, he marvelled at the mournfulness of that land of Liberty. These grim, gaunt Yankee farmers, counting their stooks of corn in silence, filled the good Gaul with something like dismay:

"Quelle différence du travail grave de ce peuple et de l'activité gaie, riante, chantante, des moissoneurs de mon pays. Tout le monde y était content! . . . Les rires, quoique perpétuels, ne dérangeaient pas le travail! Et les foins! Et les vendanges! Quel peuple au monde sait plus jouir du bonheur."

## VI

Young, with some slight exaggeration, rated one-third of the French territory as belonging to the peasant on the eve of the great Revolution. His editress, Miss Betham Edwards, has taken pains to verify this assumption, and in consequence assures us that not more than one-fourth of French land belonged to the labourer in 1787. Be sure that this quarter of the kingdom was the richest and the most highly cultivated. Here was no waste land, no marsh, no deer-forest, no game-preserve. Not far from Montpellier our traveller was struck with the luxuriant vegetation of a rocky district, a landslip composed for the chief part of huge boulders, yet enclosed and planted with the most industrious attention: "Every man has an olive, a mulberry, an almond or a peach tree scattered among the rocks, so

that the whole ground is covered with the oddest mixture of these plants and bulging roots. . . . Such a knot of active husbandmen, who turn their rocks into scenes of fertility, because, I suppose, *their own*, would do the same by the wastes if animated by the same beneficent principle." Again, one day, near Pau, he came across a scene "so new to me in France that I could scarce believe my eyes: a succession of many well-built, tight and *comfortable* farming cottages, built of stone and covered with tiles, each having its little garden enclosed by clipt thorn-hedges, with plenty of peach and other fruit trees, some fine oaks scattered in the hedges, and young trees nursed up with so much care that nothing but the fostering love of the owner could effect anything like it. An air of neatness, warmth and comfort breathes over the whole. It is all in the hands of little proprietors, without the farms being so small as to occasion a vicious and miserable population. Proprietorship is visible in the new-built houses and stables, the little gardens, the hedges, the courts before the doors, even in the crops for poultry and the sties for pigs."

More than a hundred years after the Revolution we may pause and admire the picture of these little farmsteads, as they flourished on the very eve of that great upheaval, for we may consider the condition that they represent as the happiest and most favourable for a rural district.

While Arthur Young was visiting and graphically describing the villages of France, a man of considerable gifts, but always, in those days as in these, an obscure individual, without renown or influence, was actually living in one of these hamlets and constantly observing what went on before his eyes. Even to-day, even among the students of his period, few had heard the name of J. J. Gauthier, Curé de la Lande de Gul, when, in February, 1903, a young

historian, M. Pierre La Lande, attracted, perhaps, by a similarity of name, exhumed his "Essai sur les Moeurs Champêtres," and printed a series of extracts from it in the *Revue Bleue*. Published for the first time in 1787—the very year of Young's travels—the essay of the Curé de la Lande never attained the least celebrity; the whirlwind of the Revolution caught it in its eddy, and engulfed it along with drift of more importance. The tiny book, preserved in one sole copy, existing in the Municipal Library of Alençon, has to-day more value and more interest than it could have possessed a hundred years ago. It is a series of rustic portraits in the taste of the time, but obviously drawn from life, and betraying in their lively unpractised touch the hand of the gifted amateur, who often has that knack of catching a likeness which escapes your heaven-born artist's skill. We see the curé, himself a peasant—avaricious by nature and breeding, yet charitable by grace—as he tramps the windy downs at lambing-time to count his tithe, implacable in the assertion of his rights, were it merely to half a calf's head or a dozen starveling pears, yet capable of sharing his food and dividing his last faggot with the poorest of his flock. He looks not much wealthier himself, as he strides across the scene, his stalwart limbs clad in an old patched cassock, with his summer soutane flung across his shoulders, to serve as a plaid, above a worn-out judge's gown, picked up second-hand. From his rusty wig to his vast and heavy high-low shoes, the curé is as ill-accoutred as any peasant of his flock. And he is scarce possessed of a more liberal education; he exorcises the thunderbolt with bell and book, and sprinkles with holy water the unfertile field.

The curé's parishioners are as superstitious as himself, but singularly devoid of any real religious feeling. "The farmer is Christian enough in outward things. The Holy

Virgin has a niche over his door, and he lights a taper there on feast days. He goes to church on high days and holidays, and takes the communion at Easter. But he has no great opinion of his parish priest, who rates him for beating his wife and forbids him to place out his money at usury. And as for his morals . . . he holds that an act is bad or good according to what you risk by it, so that, if he see no rope a-dangling as the consequence of the deed, he will suppose it good, or at least indifferent. . . . Yon farmer in the market-place is an honest man; he has not stolen the heifer he pushes before him. Only he knows the beastie's weak points, and will contrive to sell it you before *you* find them out. He has fed it up, curled and combed it, chosen the propitious moment—be sure he will not acquaint you with anything which may not meet the eye. . . . The vet. is more thought of than the doctor in our village. If a cow sickens, the farmer is anxious and worried, tries this drug and that, sends for the horse-leech. But if old Gaffer in the ingle droop and die, no one thinks of the doctor, nor would any one of the household stay at home in harvest-time to wait on his last hour. . . . There goes Goodman What's-your-name! He is well-to-do, and has added field to field. But hear him talk, you'ld suppose him poorer than the very beggar in the church porch. He's always grumbling. Corn for sowing costs a mint of money; times are hard; *he* never has the luck to make a bargain at the Fair. Tell him he is comfortably off, and you'll offend him mortally. Call him a poor beggar as loud as you please; he will like you all the better."

Well, such is our poor fallen human nature! We could make such thumbnail sketches in many a village anywhere to-day. What is peculiar to pre-Revolutionary France is the respective attitudes of rich and poor. The poorest of

the rich are sustained by a proper pride, a sense of their superiority, inconceivable to-day. The poor gentleman may live in a tawdry manor, tumbling about his ears for lack of due repairs; in his sordid seclusion, with no betters and few equals to enlarge his mind by their society, one thing alone emerges from the squalid round of his privations, and that is his ancestral pride.

"He holds the art of writing a mere mechanical exercise" (says our curé), "and thinks he knows enough for a gentleman if he can sign his name. He has a high idea of his birth and his prerogatives, and keeps his painted coat of arms bright and fresh in the church porch. He treats his peasant like a despot, dispenses justice, extorts his manorial rights, exacts his thirteenth with rigour. . . . He is exempt from taxes. But his old manor has neither turret nor dovecot (the outward signs of *noblesse*), and he can boast neither of fiefs nor vassals. Still, he is none the less a noble. Madame is never seen without her Fontange (a lace headdress), though she be busy with her housekeeping—nay, though we find her in the stable, milking the cows. There is no woman-servant at the manor-house; an odd-lad-about cooks and gardens, serves at table and rubs down the horse. Monsieur, in constant alarm lest he be taken for a commoner, goes, on Sunday mornings, not indeed to church, where he has no pew (another country gentleman having, probably, a vested right to that public preference known as *les Honneurs de l'Eglise*), but to the churchyard, where he sits during service, his hound and his gun beside him, careful that some pale beam of his superior rank may set off his condition in every circumstance."

The pride and the poverty of the good old country gentleman struck many a disinterested observer. The French *Revue* (the late *Revue des Revues*) published, on May 15th,

1903, some most interesting letters, written from the little town of Fezensagnet between 1774 and 1776 by a Protestant lady, born in Germany, but French by race, and living in Gascony on the eve of the Revolution. The squalor, the sordid ways, the crass ignorance of the smaller rural gentry appalled this Madame Leclerc, though she has nothing but praise for the peasants and for the nobles of high rank. But these needy gentry, the shabby-genteel—the "half-sirs," as they say in Ireland—are almost the only nobles to be met with in rural districts, "et je ne crois pas qu'il y ait rien d'aussi manant, d'aussi ignorant et d'aussi brute." She finds the village peasants better dressed and better mannered as a class, with among them, here and there, individuals really superior: "il ne leur manquerait que de la pondre pour avoir l'air d'élégants," barefoot though they be. The castle is shut up from time immemorial; its great solid walls and huge keep stand empty, save for the agent's residence. My lord Duke, meanwhile, is at Versailles, and the French peasant never gives a thought to his absent Grace. Listen to the Curé of La Lande:—

"Came ye straight in descent from Bernard the Dane, or the faithful Osmond; though your ancestors were liege men of Merowig or Charlemagne, yet hope not, poor gentleman! that Hodge shall have any reverence for your rank and title. Wear your orders, gird on your sword, and go to the cattle fair; the best of you will meet with less respect than John the Burgess, with his good cloak and leather wallet stuffed with coin. I know not why, but this brutish herd has lost all confidence in the word of a man of rank, of old so much esteemed." This stubborn and stalwart disrespect, this frank irreverence of the French peasant, struck more than one acute observer, on the eve of '89. Mirabeau, in his *L'Ami des Hommes* has remarked

the same trait, but not without supplying an explanation: "In my own lifetime" (he writes) "I have seen a great change in the relations of landlord and peasant. Our lords, always absent at court, are no longer of any use or service to their tenantry, and it is natural that, forgetting, they should also be forgot."

## VII

Then came the Revolution, an event so great that I cannot hope to give the faintest, smallest image of it in this tiny frame. A world perished, and rose anew from its ashes, purified of many abuses, deprived of some valuable relics. But the substance of that world, which is French society, reappeared, after seeming annihilation, not greatly changed, nor absolutely renovated.

Of this there are a cloud of witnesses. Among them let us choose Larochefoucauld-Liancourt, whom we left an exile in America. Restored to his native country in 1800, after some ten years' absence, he notes the progress of agricultural reform. Large estates have given place to very small ones, which, as a rule, produce a yield at least one-fourth more abundant than the old. Everywhere cultivation is more intelligent, for the owner puts his mind into his tillage. The homes of the peasants are improved, more spacious and cleaner; the labourers themselves are certainly less ignorant than their fathers.

"Ils sont plus qu'eux en état de réfléchir, de combiner, un peu moins éloignés de toute innovation."

So writes, disinterestedly, the dispossessed Duke, as he sets the plough in the stately lawns and avenues planted by Le Nôtre, content to farm a corner of his old estate, camped

in the servant's quarters of his ruined palace. We could not have a more able or a more conscientious authority. But these were but the beginnings of a general reform.

In 1815 another philosophic English traveller passing through France—one Thomas Hodgskin—was struck by the sordid misery of the French peasant. And, in fact, the Revolution is not over even yet.

The *corvée* is supposed to be extinct, but the smaller country roads are still mended by "prestation," that is to say, by the personal labour of the farmer or his men, and he must find both the material and the means of transport. The feudal *banalités* were solemnly declared defunct in 1789—that is to say, the peasant no longer could be forced to grind his corn, or to press his wine, olives, and walnuts, in the seigneurial mills. Yet, to take one contemporary instance among many: the farmers of the Isle of Bouin in Vendée are compelled by contract to bring their sheaves to the thrashing machines of their landlord; the only difference being that this landlord is no longer a noble, but a great agricultural syndicate—the Société des Polders. In the same commune, the same society exacts the feudal rights of terrage—that is to say, it requires a sum of money, a yearly premium, paid in addition to the annual rent in kind—and it also levies a tax on the winepress, just as if the Revolution had never taken place. "C'est l'Ancien Régime à peine modifié," writes M. Léon Dubreuil.*

At Olmet, our village in the Cantal, the farmers pay a quit-rent, or *redevance*, to their landlords in addition to the rent: so many brace of poultry, so many cheeses, so many pounds of butter; a special kind of cheese, the most delicate if the smallest, weighing from two to twenty kilos, is made for this purpose, and still bears its ancient name, the

* *Pages Libres*, No. 103.

*fromage de maître.* To-day, even as six score years ago, the farmers of the Bourbonnais do all their landlord's carrying —wood from the forest, corn to and from the mill, stones from the quarry, according to the mediæval *corvée de transport;* and here, too, the quit-rent flourishes undiminished: butter, fowls, turkeys, are exacted in tribute from the tenant. It may happen that he sell his milk straight from the cow to a dealer in Paris or to an hotel at Vichy; in this case, he must buy milk from his neighbours in order to churn the seigneurial butter, as nearly always he buys his turkeys, the birds being very delicate and difficult to rear. Here, also, reigns the right of terrage under the name of *impôt colonique.* And, in this part of the country, the game laws seem scarcely altered by the Revolution; the crops being often destroyed by the abundance of wild creatures, without any indemnity offered to the farmer.

But everywhere in rural France an eye educated in feudal custom sees the survival of the Elder Order. Readers of Zola's novel, *La Terre* (scarcely, one would think, a treatise of seigneurial rights), will remember the telling scene when the old peasant, no longer able to cultivate his lands, cedes them to his children in return for a yearly rent of four and twenty pounds. "You'll pay me the rent," says he, "and then, besides, there's the quit-rent: a barrel of wine *per annum,* a hundred faggots, and every week ten litres of milk, a dozen eggs and three cream cheeses."

The children protest, but the village notary declares: "The wine, the faggots, the cheese and the eggs are objects of use and custom. People would point at you in the street if you did not pay the *redevances en nature.*"

Of all these survivals from the mediæval times the most frequent is the habit of letting farms *en métayage,* that is to say, paying the rent in kind, on the system of half profits.

It is, I imagine, a very ancient and natural custom; for I read in the Talmud: "Four shares to the labourer, and four shares to the owner of the soil;" yet, for some mysterious reason, this arrangement, which seems on the face of it so fair and equitable, is as disastrous to the farmer, in hiring a farm, as it is to the author in publishing a book. In all the South of France, — in the Landes, Dordogne, Gironde, especially—a great part of the country still is cultivated in this sort of partnership. At the close of the eighteenth century, two-thirds of the soil of France—according to some authorities as much as five-sixths—were occupied in this fashion, for the labourers were, as a rule, too poor to rent their holdings in solid coin. Even to-day you may roughly gauge the prosperity of a district in this fashion: if the agricultural classes are prosperous, then they are farmers or peasant owners; if they are sunk in poverty, be sure they are *métayers*. Too often in this case the landlord is an absentee, and consequently careless of improvements; too often the *colons* are penniless and ill nourished, and so ignorant that the soil, perforce, is poorly tilled, the barns and stables ill repaired, the stock badly managed. For what is no one's property is no one's pride. The landlord gives the land, and the capital, or *cheptel*—which comprises the stock and barns, etc.; an inventory of these is taken when a tenant enters into possession, and he is compelled to keep them in repair. On his side, the peasant gives his work. And the harvest is divided, either in kind—grain, wine, olives, cattle, at the time of their maturity—or more often in money, when the peasant brings to his landlord half of the profits after the fair or market at which he has sold the produce. The arrangement is simple, and this is the chief argument in its favour and the only reason why it endures. . . . A farm hand and a dairymaid fall in love and

marry; they have no capital, but they can work, and in a dozen years they hope that their children will aid their efforts; for a child of eight or ten can be of much use on a small farm. They hire an acre or two of land, which they undertake to cultivate *à moitié fruits*, hoping to economize enough to purchase little by little a freehold of their own. A man and his wife, both working in the fields, can cultivate about three acres of cornland; if they have the wherewithal to buy a cow they will probably add three or four acres of pasture, paying the rent in produce. With such poor farming as they can bestow,—scant labour, less knowledge, little manure,—their holding of six or seven acres may bring them in some twenty pounds a year. How can they save on such an income? For they must renew stock and tools, tide over a bad season, bring up their children, tend their sick, bury their dead. They will just scrape along, deeming themselves fortunate indeed if they lay by a small provision for their extreme old age. "In the isle of Bouin," writes M. Dubreuil, "such is the fertility of the soil that landlords and farmers alike are certain of prosperity. Only the *métayer* languishes in poverty."

But *métayage* is slowly and steadily dying out. It lingers in the west and south; it languishes in the centre. In France to-day, on an average, if you take a hundred farms, you may count some seventy landlords managing their own estates, a score of farmers, and only ten *métayers*. By the middle of this century it is probable that rural France will be divided between the large farmer and the small peasant owner.

AZAY-LE-RIDEAU

AZAY-LE-RIDEAU

## VIII

When the Bourbons returned to France after Waterloo they had, as the phrase runs, learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The nobles took possession of the remains of their estates, and thought to restore the habits and privileges of their forefathers, or at least to adapt to modern manners the principles of the *ancien régime.* But they found in the peasant a sleepless suspicion, a silent energy and cunning, which thwarted all their efforts, and which, if they persisted, would often turn to violence, maintaining the rights of the people by the horrors of a *Jacquerie.* The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed more than one peasants' revolt. And if some plot of the reactionaries should one day place again upon the throne of France a son of the House of Orleans, or a Bonaparte Pretender, be sure the *croquants* of the South, the *Jacques* of the North, would defend their liberties again as violently to-morrow.

Two fine novels, each a masterpiece, treat, from different points of view, this resistance of the peasant class, and the consequent disintegration of the great feudal domains. *Jacquou le Croquant*, by an almost unknown novelist, Eugène Le Roy, is the work of a man over sixty, a native of Périgord, working on the traditions of his native place and the tales of his grandfathers. Published in the last years of the nineteenth century, it gives an extraordinarily vivid picture of rural Southern France, as the author may have seen it in his earliest childhood, before 1848. The book is written from the peasants' point of view, and full of enthusiastic Republican sentiment. Balzac's *Les Paysans* hold a brief for the other side. One of Napoleon's generals, the Comte de Montcornet, purchases in 1815 a feudal estate

on the borders of Burgundy and the Morvan, and attempts to dwell there in the due state and pomp of a great noble. He preserves game, vows vengeance on poachers, protects his forest trees against the customary thefts of the village, and, like the farmer in Wordsworth's ballad, forbids the old women to filch his faggots. And naturally he attracts the hatred and suspicion of the peasant. Even his own agent sides with them against him:—

"On veut vous forcer à vendre les Aigues. Sachez le: depuis Conches jusqu'à la Ville-aux-Fayes, il n'est pas de paysan, de petit bourgeois, de fermier, de cabaretier, qui n'ait son argent prêt pour le jour de la curée."

And the book ends with the triumph of the peasants and the parcelling of the domain.

"Le pays n'était plus reconnaissable. Les bois mystérieux, les avenues du parc, tout avait été défriché; la campagne ressemblait à la carte d'échantillons d'un tailleur. Le paysan avait pris possession de la terre en vainqueur et en conquérant. Elle était déjà divisée en plus de mille lots et la population avait triplé entre Conches et Blangy."

"Such is progress!" exclaims Emile Blondet, on an impulse of passionate irony.

It is not picturesque certainly. And yet I remember a magnificent picture of Sisley's, representing just such a scene: small fields of cabbage, and strips of rye, with one bouquet of poplars, basking in the hot blue of a July noonday; and I know no finer landscape. Still, we will admit with Emile Blondet that the mysterious forest glades were infinitely lovelier. On one side, the utmost beauty and luxury reserved for one man; on the other, a thousand fields, and a tripled population living in tripled comfort. On which side is progress? On which side is the price too dear to pay? That is the question.

## THE FRENCH PEASANT

An old French lady, who could recall the *ancien régime,* was wont to say, when invited on a country visit: "No, I never go into the provinces, since they have turned all the castles into farms." She had a prophetic eye. If the castles are to survive, they must be turned, more or less, into farms, and their owners are becoming increasingly aware of the fact.

Among the young gentlemen of France to-day there is a spirit of return to the land. The Institut Agronomique instructs every year a bevy of eager agriculturists, many of them belonging to the upper classes and possessing landed estates of their own. These young men at five and twenty are content to leave Paris and cultivate their acres in Normandy or Languedoc. For myself, I think them wise. I would be, if I could, a large farmer in a grass country, raising cattle and cheese (a crop less chancy than corn), with plenty of children, all employed on the estate, and a handsome wife, ever the first to rise and the last a-bed. Only the life of an inspector of forests (no one has ever said all that the Fables of La Fontaine owe to his employment as a Master of Waters and Forests), or that of a university don (which latter existence, indeed, much resembles my own), appear to me quite as pleasant as this. I know one or two such farmers, and think them aware of their good fortune; their neighbours eye them with envy, for such men are rare, since few of the farming class possess hereditary acres, while few can afford to pay the rent of a farm large enough to prosper—some £400 a year, for instance, such as my neighbour, Farmer Langeac, pays for Olinet. It is true that less land is needed to make a large income from cereal land or vineyards; but, when we come to crops, if the rent is less, the expenses of farming are much greater. The accounts of a farm in the isle of

Bouin are lying on my writing-table: I find that when his rent is paid to the utmost farthing, the farmer must still reckon on spending some four guineas an acre on such necessary processes as ploughing, sowing, manuring, reaping, carrying, threshing, etc. Doubtless he may reap a considerable profit, for the polders of Vendée are among the most fertile fields of France. But only a man of substance can make so large a stake, or may afford to renew it annually, to tide over a bad season, keep his barns and machines in repair, and pay every week no paltry sum in wages.

## IX

More frequent and less ample is the lot of the peasant owner. No fields are so prosperous as his, for no fields are tilled and dug with such untiring devotion: spade-culture forms the staple of his art on the tiny strips of land he is so proud to call his own. If, at the Revolution, one-fourth of the soil was in the hands of the peasant, the proportion to-day is certainly far greater; but the farms are smaller. In the plains of Beauce, round Orleans, the peasant freeholds compose more than three-fourths of the land, but the constant division of property by equal inheritance has reduced every little farm by multiplying its owners. The soil of this thickly populated district is so fertile that a farm in Beauce, however tiny, may be supposed sufficient to support a family; and in all rich and teeming countrysides, such as abound in France, the excessive division of property, consequent on the application of the Code Napoléon, has perhaps, up to the last twenty years or so, done more good than harm. An acre of strawberry gardens

at Plougastel, of vegetables at Roscoff, of carnations at St. Remy de Provence, is still a valuable piece of property, an exceeding artistry and skill in cultivation compensating here the narrow limits of the field. But in such a case the soil, the climate, the economic conditions must all work for the farmer and conspire to crown his efforts. In ordinary pasture, in light soils too poor for wheat, too chilly for the vine, the peasant owner needs a larger glebe. Three acres and a cow are not sufficient to maintain a family in constant well-being, unless the circumstances be exceptionally favourable.

A small Socialist review, unusually well written and well informed, *Pages Libres*, has recently published a series of rural studies, each the monography of some small village in the provinces of France. In this way, the hamlet of Voulangis-en-Brie, the fertile polders of the Isle of Bouin, the villages of the Bourbonnais, so dear to the shades of Sterne and Arthur Young, each and all become known to us almost as if we had passed a summer there, for the schoolmaster, the large farmer, the local poet and archæologist, have each had a hand in these humble but not unimportant annals, and faithfully reproduce the various world before their eyes.

Voulangis, a village in Brie, counts five hundred inhabitants, almost all of them living on the land as farmers or agricultural labourers; the commune comprises 958 hectares. For clearer comprehension, let us say that it contains about 2700 English acres, of which a quarter are forest and woodland. Subtract again some three-score acres occupied by roads and lanes, and there remain 1750 acres devoted to practical agriculture. The odd thing is that these 1750 acres are divided into no less than 10,600 lots of land!

Few indeed are the peasant owners who have their scanty acres, so to speak, in a ring fence. No, with a strip here and a paddock there, according to the hazard of heritage or purchase, their tiny possessions are generally scattered over an area of several miles, thus greatly enhancing the fatigue and expense of the farmer. More than mere chance has presided at this minute dispersion. In all classes in France (and not only since the Revolution, but by a very ancient law and custom which dates back to the early Middle Ages), all the children inherit equally. Even in noble families, the law of primogeniture, as we understand it in England, has never obtained in France. In some rare cases, a *majorat* favoured the elder son; but as a rule he had nothing beyond the very modest privilege which awarded him the family chateau and the land immediately adjacent—the *vol du chapon*—the surroundings "as far as a cock can flutter." As for the farming class, and even the class of country gentry, from time immemorial their lands have been divided between all their progeny alike. Suppose that a peasant farmer in Brie has so many acres of meadow, so many acres of forest, so many acres of rich arable land and a good-sized vineyard; do you imagine that on his death one son will take the pastures, another the cornland, and so forth? Not a bit of it! Each child will claim a slice of each sort of soil; and their children again will subdivide, till the strips of meadow, rye, cabbage, or vine, are not fields at all, but merely gardens. During the first seventy years or so of the nineteenth century, this morselling of the land suited well enough with the habits of agriculture in rural France. The plots of land were tilled with the tiny one-pronged *araire*, or Roman plough, just a tooth of wood tearing the fertile earth; more often they were not tilled at all, but merely worked with spade and hoe and pitchfork.

Comparatively few peasant-farmers owned a horse—some weather-beaten patient ass or cow carried in panniers the wood from the forest, the manure from the stable, and the corn to the mill. The women and the children fed the beasts—there were but one or two of them in the byre—with handfuls of long grass, or leaves of trees, plucked by the roadsides or in the forest glades, and rolled to a bundle in their apron—even as Arthur Young remarked them of old, and thought it a great sign of poverty. No need, however, to grow much clover, or maize, or vetch or mangel-wurzel, for the cows in those days. These cows, fed on weeds and grass, these tiny plots turned over with spade and fork, afforded a considerable profit in times when the small farmer, owing to the difficulty of transport, had not to reckon with the products of the model-farm in a distant district. But railways and machines have changed all that. The plough, and especially the steam-plough, the thrashing-machine, the reaping-machine, are useless in these garden-grounds, while the expense of manual labour increases every year. A peasant-farmer now can only prosper where his holding is so small that he can cultivate it *en famille.* At Voulangis, for instance, a haymaker earns from 5 to 6 francs a day, a harvester from 7 to 10, while the thrashers, even in winter time, average 4 francs of daily wage. These prices are beyond the reach of small owners. And no less beyond their reach are the machines which do the same work so rapidly and cheaply. Yet they must sell their grain at the price set by the large farms where corn is sown, reaped, thrashed, and carried by steam labour. Moreover, the agricultural colleges and model-farms have raised the public standard, and buyers are no longer satisfied with the produce which contented an earlier generation; while transport is so easy that an establishment of repute can

diffuse its fruits, milk, or butter, far and wide. At Olmet, for instance, I do not eat the butter of the farm, ill-churned and made from clotted cream, but that supplied by the Etablissement Agricole de Roche-sur-Loue, hundreds of miles away in Franche Comté.

Save for the middleman, who absorbs too large a proportion of the profits, the peasant owner might still make a living out of his orchard, his vegetable garden, and his poultry-yard. Was it not Gladstone who said to the English farmer: "If corn don't pay, grow roses"? The flowers, eggs, and fruit of France are a source of incalculable riches, and are consumed not only at home, but sent in large quantities to England. Unfortunately, the peasant is, as a rule, intellectually idle, incapable of combination, suspicious, and impatient of new-fangled ideas; he finds it simpler to sell his goods to the buyer from Paris as his father did before him, than to combine with his neighbours in an agricultural syndicate or trade's union. Let him once see, however, that his advantage lies in a peasants' union, and he will soon find out the way. The principle of solidarity has scarcely penetrated as yet into rustic parts, but the need of resisting the low prices imposed by the large farms using machine labour will certainly, in time, teach the peasant many things. Let his mind once grasp the idea of a common prosperity—where Tom's good luck is not ensured by the misfortunes of Dick and Harry, but where all are implicated in the well-being of each—let him forget to suspect and learn to combine; from that day forth his social future and well-being are assured. There are fewer middlemen in France than there were fifty years ago, and, oddly enough, this is a signal disadvantage to the peasant. Fifty years ago the crowd of buyers who thronged the markets every week in Brie, in Beauce, in all

the fertile "home" provinces of the centre, bid one against the other for cheese, butter, fruit, and fodder, so that competition brought about a reasonable offer. To-day the railway has brought the farthest province within reach of the Paris market; and, in the capital, that market is directed, no longer by a number of shopkeepers, but by a few trusts or commission-merchants who dispose of every opening. These few middlemen, all acquainted, form a ring, and keep prices so low that the small farmer often makes little, sometimes *no* profit, on his bargain.

In the spring of 1902, the National schoolmaster of Voulangis-en-Brie, a certain M. Vaillant, felt his heart burn within him to see the buyers grow so rich and the peasants remain so poor. He resolved to found a Farmers' Association for the sale of fruit to the Paris market; he started with seven or eight peasant proprietors and a buyer in Paris. The first stone fruit of the season is the damson, grown almost entirely for the English market. The syndicate made a "boom" on damsons and early pears, which are hard fruit, easy to pack and little injured by travel; owing to their inexperience in packing, they suffered some loss on their greengages; yet at the end of the autumn, so great were their profits, compared to those of their neighbours, that they determined to extend the scope of their operations. In place of selling fruit to Paris and London, they bought chemical manures from the factories and sold them to the farmers of Brie. Here, again, they scored a success; out of the profits they purchased an automatic seed-sifter. They hope in a few years to possess a complete set of sowing, thrashing, reaping, and carrying machines, steam-ploughs, and harrows, etc., which will remain at the disposal of the peasant-farmers who form the association.

## X

If a small farmer fails and cannot pay his rent, he takes what remains of his stock and tools, when his debts are paid, and lets out these and his powers of labour in *métayage* to some landlord, who supplies the land and the seed for his part of the bargain. In many places, indeed, the landlord supplies stock and land and seed; but even so *métayage* is, as a rule, chiefly profitable to the landlord, who may make as much as from 12 to 15 per cent. on his capital. The tenant has generally no capital behind him, and in bad seasons is compelled to borrow at usurious interest, for no one will lend to a *métayer*, whose only stake lies in his arms, stock, and tools. These latter wear out, are broken, die, have to be renewed; if the cart-horse break his neck, or the cow die of anthrax, on the top of a bad harvest, his plight is scarce better than that of the poor hind whom Aucassin encountered in the greenwood; for, whichever party supply them, the landlord has a right to exact that stock and tools shall always correspond with the inventory drawn up when the tenant entered into possession. Thus, if a run of bad luck may soon bring a farmer's noble to ninepence and transform him into a *métayer*, still more easy is the descent from the farmer *à mi-fruits* to the condition of farm servant or agricultural labourer. This is the lowest rung on the rural ladder.

Fifty years ago no class of labour was worse paid than that of farm servants. A small maid on a farm earned some four and twenty shillings a year—thirty francs!—her board, her clothes, her washing, and lodging. Nowadays, even children of twelve earn from four to six pounds a year—in addition to their keep and certain perquisites—

while, after sixteen, their wages rise to three hundred francs (£12); and a full-grown man, besides his keep and perquisites, earns, as a rule, some twenty pounds a year.

Far rougher is the life of the labouring man, generally married, and living in a small cottage which, in most places, costs him as much as four pounds (100 francs) a year, though at Olmet, where I live, a very decent one-roomed cottage, with a loft, cellar, and garden-plot, may be rented for less than two pounds—forty-five francs. He has perhaps a little garden of his own, with a pig, some fowls, and a goat which his wife takes to feed in the lanes. Often he has no settled place, but labours first with this farmer, and then with that, always overworked; for an odd man is only called in at time of stress—hoeing time, or hay time, or for the harvest, or the thrashing, or hedging-and-ditching. But at least, in such seasons, in the sweat of his brow he earns his bread. All summer long he can count on two to four francs a day, rising to five or even seven at haymaking and harvest. It is not till November, when the thrashing is mainly finished, that his real troubles begin. If there be walls or roofs to repair, or a road to be set in order, here is a job for him, in case the neighbouring farmers be well enough off to unloose their purse-strings; or, again, he can serve in the quarries, when the farmer has to supply the stones for mending the high roads by a "prestation en nature:" a quarryman earns about fifteen pence a day, which is better than nothing in winter, when you have a family to feed. Often, too, the labourer turns wood-cutter or charcoal-burner at this season, walking many miles morning and evening, to and from his work, with a little osier basket hanging from his arm, which contains a cannikin of vegetable-soup, with a hunch of bread and cheese, and perhaps an onion.

In a little pamphlet, "En Bourbonnais," published at the office of *Pages Libres*, a local novelist of the Allier district, M. Guillaumin, has added up the yearly receipts of a day labourer in good work, turn by turn haymaker and harvester, thrasher, wood-cutter, and so on. His annual earnings amount, in English coin, to twenty-one pounds twelve shillings. During the summer months, though he be fed abundantly at the farms where he works, his family must live, and he must feed himself all winter time. A quartern loaf a day is the least we can allow the little household, for bread will be the staple of their diet; bread and cabbage-soup, potato-soup and bread, will vary the menu, with an occasional stew of a little veal or bacon with carrots and onions. And bread is dear in France. A policy of protection has raised the price of the loaf, which is doubtless an excellent thing for the large farmer. But, out of his twenty-one pounds a year, Jacques Bonhomme, the day labourer, must pay no less than sixteen pounds for bread alone. No one would profit more than the French peasant by a cheapening of the price of corn. The cottage will cost another four pounds; and there remains one pound twelve shillings for school expenses, shoes, clothing, fuel, doctoring, and such indulgences as wine and tobacco. One pound twelve shillings for all the luxuries of life! Supplemented, no doubt, by the sale of the pig, and the kids, and the poultry; for the labourer of the Allier is too poor, as a rule, to put a fowl in his pot on Sundays, or to enjoy a rasher of his own bacon by his own fireside. True, in many parts of the country, the labourers, like the farm hands, pretend to certain perquisites. Here, in Olmet, for instance, the principal labourer on a farm receives seventeen pounds a year in money, with a sack of potatoes, a sack of chestnuts,

and a sack of meal. Yet I cannot be as optimistic as Mrs. Tammas Glencairn in Mr. Barrie's story. "My man," says she, "has a good wage, and he's weel worthy o't. He gets three and twenty pound in the year, half a score o' yowes, a coo's grass, a bow o' meal, a bow o' pitatas, and as mony peats as he likes to cast and win and cairt." The French peasant is much in the same case; but he doubts sometimes if all be for the best in the best possible world.

## XI

Military service has shown him that people live otherwise in the towns. The spread of machines has lessened the necessary work of the fields; once out of work, the labourer, instead of seeking a fresh place on a farm, sets off on the road to Paris in quest of better days.

The rural exodus has become of late years a serious problem, affecting the very source of wealth and well-being in country districts. I think the village schools have been in some measure to blame for this.

Although the first Bill on rural education was passed as early as 1833, nothing was done, in fact, to instruct the mass of village children in France until the advent of the Second Empire, and very little indeed before 1871, when the matter was seriously taken in hand. In my *Life of Renan*, I have spoken of the general impulse towards a moral and intellectual reform which followed in France so closely on the disasters of the Franco-Prussian war. The Prussian schoolmaster, even more than the Prussian generals, was supposed to have directed the victorious armies of the enemy; and, in education, no less than in arms, the

conquered country began to prepare her *revanche*, by raising for this purpose a generation of avengers.

The villages in 1871 were, in fact, almost as squalid, as narrow, as ignorant as before the revolution. The schoolmasters went to their posts in the spirit of missionaries prepared to civilize a tribe of savages, ignoring the ideal of the people among whom they dwelt, looking down on them with lofty benevolence, intending to concede nothing, but to convert, to quicken, and to change the heart. The first generation educated in the Primary Schools was treated even as a brand snatched from the burning. The children had learned from their masters to despise the animal ignorance, the brutish tastes, the sordid avarice that too often disfigured the habits of the village. And what they had learned to admire was something of which the village gave no conception.

For meanwhile in the towns the Socialist siren sang, "Come here, come here, and I will give you prosperity and peace." And to the towns went the village youth. Wages were higher there; the standard of comfort suited better with a newly acquired ideal of refinement; above all, the smoky air was full of ideas. Ideas are a passion with the French, but with no class so absolutely as with the humbler ranks of Socialism. There reigned in those regions an instant hope in the approaching advent of a better world—a millennium, in fact, as living, as real as that which animated the first era of the Christian Church. The Socialist working man was somewhat in the position of the Christian convert of one of those great towns of ancient Asia Minor or Italy—a man with the secret of a New Hope—while the villages, Pagan now as then, slumbered in their contented ignorance. To go back would have been to apostatize, to renounce, not only the life-in-life

LUYNES

of an ideal, but also the means of education, the schools, the newspapers, the working-man's club informally united round the zinc counter of the *Marchand-de-vin*, the Boulevards, the museums, the *fêtes*, the sense of beauty, the sense of politics, of science, of social solidarity. And if these parvenus in the moral and intellectual sphere were often crude, fanatical, harsh, intolerant, at least they were (what their rural fathers had not been) the heirs of all the ages. Every year the schools sent more and more young rustics to Paris, *frotteurs* and sellers of wood and coal from Auvergne, masons from the Creuse, old clo' men from the Lozère, chimney-sweepers from Savoy. In Paris they found a clan of compatriots ready to welcome them, to show them how to earn their bread, and how, according to the newest gospel, to save their souls alive.

And still the drain continues. But trade of late years has not been so good in Paris. In many branches of industry there has been overproduction—mechanical engineers, for instance, and masons have less to do. And often the agricultural labourer, having tramped to town, may find no work ready to his hands. I read in the reports of the Société Nationale d'Agriculture of a certain farm in Brie, which has been bought by the Assistance Publique, in order to give work to those unhappy labouring men who have fallen into beggary among the unfriendly streets. Here, on the fields and furrows of La Chalmelle, they touch their mother earth again, like Antæus; thence they repair, sadder and wiser men, to such glebes or vineyards as are short of hire. In its humble capacity, the farm of La Chalmelle attempts to react against the mighty current ever streaming from the country to Paris, establishing a tiny counter-stream from Paris to the land. This rural exodus is a grave question. Indeed, all thoughtful persons must pause

and fear when they come—as they may come, alas!—on a deserted village. For the fields are the source of our food and the fundamental riches of a nation. To forsake them for any cause, is to forsake the substance for the shadow. Therefore Reactionaries, such as the successors of Le Play, and Socialists, such as M. Vandervelde, are at one in attempting to stem the ominous tide. The State patronizes cattle-shows and subsidizes technical colleges; successful farmers are decorated no less than military heroes, and few orders are more esteemed than the *Mérite Agricole.* Here and there, manufacturers attempt, by using the water-power of a cascade or river, to give the rural workman employment, without drawing him from home. And it is probable that isolated factories employing the youth of country districts will become more and more frequent in the future, and increase the well-being of the landed labourer rather by lessening the hours of employment and leaving him his harvest than by raising the rate of wage. But all this is little enough, unless we have also that inner force which sways a period, a generation, and which sometimes inclines us more and more to Nature, reviving in our hearts the desire of the land. Still, it is a good sign that the very schoolmasters are nowadays less exclusively urban and literary in their standards. Science, indeed, is beginning to dethrone literature even in the National school, and what is Science but an Aspect of Nature? Science leads back to Nature, as more important than the classics.

Among the posthumous notes of that noble apostle of national education, M. Felix Pécaut, in the little book called "Quinze Ans d'Education," which saw the light at the close of 1902, I find the following noteworthy passage:—

"They say that the National schools favour the village exodus. They say that, after six years of book-learning, the

young rustic dreads the coarse habits, the hard work, the soil, the sweat, inseparable from the life of a farm-labourer.

"What is the remedy? First of all, teach the children to take an interest, not only in books, but in the life of the fields. Teach them gardening, and how to keep bees, the making of cheese and the management of a dairy. Show them the reason of these things, their cause, and the possible improvements. Above all, in educating your little rustics, do not impose an ideal from without; work your reform from within. Make your scheme of education deliberately rural; be sober, just; teach them courage, and the contempt of mere ease and well-being; give them a wholesome, ample way of looking at things; instil the taste for an active life, the delight in physical energy. Try and turn out, not a mandarin, but a man of the fields."

## XII

A generation corresponding to this ideal would yet need one or two reforms in the law of the land before the French peasant could reach his perfect development. First of all, let us admit that the nation has outgrown the Code Napoléon, which is a system of excessive centralization. As usual, the people are in advance of the law of the land; here as elsewhere, a fossilized system cramps and hinders the expansion of life. Even at some sacrifice of order, France would be more fortunate if she were decentralized, with more importance accorded to the country towns and rural districts. Have we not seen how, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this same vice of over-centralization was fatal to the country-sides of France, even as, in the closing years of the Roman Empire, it was fatal to the country-sides of

Gaul? In this lovely land of France, over-centralization is a sort of endemic disease which we may combat, but scarcely, perhaps, eradicate. Let us do our best. It were well should the law, even if it continue the principle of equal inheritance, at least permit some laxity in practice (as an insertion of the thin edge of the wedge), allowing the estate, for instance, to remain intact in the hands of the son who farms it, though a proportion of the revenue be divided yearly among his brothers and sisters. Let us take from the Old Order what was best in it. Nothing was more frequent under the *ancien régime* than for a family to enjoy in common their paternal acres. To take a case in point:—when the great-grandfather of Ernest Renan died in 1732, his sons continued to dwell together in their old grey farm by the estuary of Ledano, without separating their shares of the estate. Gilles farmed the land; Alain, François, and Olivier manned the joint fishing-smack and salted their pilchards in common. This system of joint possession was usual in France, and suits the sociable French character. Even to-day, in some such way, the extremest results of the sub-division of property might be avoided. Thirdly, we would have every schoolmaster in France teach his children, instead of the names of the Merovingian kings, such elementary notions of physics and chemistry as explain or at least suggest the life of natural things: why the sea is salt; how the dew condenses; how the seed germinates in the earth; why such and such a soil best serves to produce such and such a crop, etc. When we see with what extraordinary swiftness the rural population of France has adopted the theories of Pasteur and their consequences, we feel that in this direction, at any rate, the rustic is not stupid. Let the peasants learn the meaning of the world in which they live; they will find it more interesting. A child who has learned to observe and

reflect has the beginnings of a liberal education, and one that will not necessarily draw him from the land.

And, again, we would teach our peasants the benefits of union. There is a great future for agricultural syndicates, buying and selling on co-operative terms, and distributing among their members the proper complement of agricultural machines; by their aid the small landowner of a few acres may be enabled to sustain the competition of the large model-farms; and perhaps, under new conditions, the agriculture of the rural districts may revive, surpassing those golden years between 1830 and 1880. But the season of adversity has not been barren. Even the farmer cannot live by bread alone; and the lean years that end the nineteenth century have witnessed the moral and mental regeneration of the French peasant. Whatever be his destiny, he is now that "man of independent mind" whom Burns proclaimed the equal of any man in any class.

# THE FORESTS OF THE OISE

# THE FORESTS OF THE OISE

## PART I

### 1893

### I

THE prettiest April still wears a wreath of frost." So runs an old French proverb, which is not always true. At least, in that bygone year of 1893 by the end of April the heat was as parched as at midsummer; roses and strawberries were hawked through the streets of Paris; the dust was a moving sepulchre, and the sunshine a burden. We longed for a plunge into the great forests of the north. Oh for the cool grass and the deep glades of woods that have been woods for these two thousand years! 'Tis something to feel one's self in a Gaulish forest—though I can remember older trees in Warwickshire. But, in the forests of the Oise, from father to son, the succession is imposing, and the delicate silver birches of Chantilly spring from ancestors who may have shadowed Pharamond.

At Chantilly the train put us down on the edge of the forest. I always wish that we had stayed there, in the little station inn, where the air is still sweet with may and lilies. But we drove on to the town, with its neat, expensive hotels, its rows of training-stables, and parched, oblong racecourse.

Chantilly is a true French village, with its one endless winding street, pearl-grey, with a castle at the end of it. From almost any point of it you see, beyond the houses, a glint of waters and hear a rustle of woods. There is an indescribable airy lightness about the place, about the fresh fine air, the loose sand of the soil, the thin green boughs of silver birch and hornbeam, the smooth-trunked beechen glades that are never allowed to grow into great forest trees. It was with an effort of the imagination that we realized the ancient stock of this slim nestling underwood where nothing looks older than Louis Philippe. The Sylvanectes, the Gaulish foresters, have so entirely disappeared.

## II

In 1893, Chantilly was still the game-preserve of a hunter-prince, and everything about it was ordered for the chase. Those wide-open grassy glades, studded with birch or oak-scrub, were haunted by the deer; and in those thickets of golden broom the heavy does prepared their nurseries. Great, floundering, russet pheasants came flying by; at every step a hare or a white-tailed rabbit started up out of the grass. Far at the further end of the forest there were deep, unsightly thickets of mud and thorn, left darkling amid the trim order of the place, for the wild boar delights in them. As we walked or drove down the neat-clipt avenues of the forest, the roads appeared impassable to the traveller, and we wondered at the contrast between their shoals of sand and the careful forestry that pares and cuts every wilding branch of the over-arching hornbeam roof. But the roads are bad on purpose; every spring they are ploughed afresh, lest they lose the lightness beloved of the horseman.

SENLIS

Every May, a beautiful fault frustrates this skilful venery, for, thick as grass, thick and sweet, the lily of the valley springs in all the brakes and shady places. The scent of the game will not lie across these miles of blossom. The hunters are in despair, and the deer, still deafened with the winter's yelp of the hounds—the deer, who sets his back against the sturdiest oak, and butts at the pack with his antlers, who swims the lakes, and from his island refuge sells his life as hard as he can—the deer, accustomed to be always vanquished, beholds himself at last befriended by an ally more invincible than water or forest oak, by the sweet innumerable white lily, innocent as himself, that every May-time sends the huntsmen home.

The lily that saves the deer is the consolation of poor women. Every morning during the brief season of its blossom, they are up before the dawn. Holding their children by the hand, they are off to the innermost dells of its forest; and before our breakfast-time they are back at the railway stations at Chantilly or Creil, laden with bunches of lilies, which they sell to the dusty passengers bound by the morning mails for London or for Brussels. Sweet flowers with the dew upon them, fragrant posies, who would not give a five-penny-piece for so much beauty? "What would you buy with your roses that is worth your roses?" sings the Persian poet. These tired country-women of the Oise would know what to reply: new sabots for the good man, a white communion veil for the second girl, a shawl for the old grandam, and a galette for the children's dinner! The lilies are a harvest to them, like any other—a sweet, voluntary, unplanted harvest that comes three months before the corn is yellow.

The lilies were all out when we drove through the woods at Chantilly. I had never seen such a sight, for we had not yet visited Compiègne, where they are still more profuse and,

I think, of a larger growth. In the Hay-woods in Warwickshire they grow sparsely, in timid clumps; and how proud of them we were! But nowhere have I seen such a sheet of coy flowers as these. Anemones and tulips of Florence, tall jonquils of Orange, ye have a plenteous rival in the north! The whole way to Commelle the glades were sweet with lilies.

Every traveller between Calais and Paris has marked unwitting the beauty of Commelle. You remember the view that precedes or follows (according to your direction) the little station of Orry-Coye? The rails are laid on the summit of a hill; the train rushes through a delicate forest of birch. Suddenly we come upon a clearing, and on the one hand we see, in a wide blue vista, the slow declining valley of the Thérain, placid and royal amid its mantling woods; while, on the other side, the hill breaks in a sort of precipice, and shows, deep below, a chain of lakelets asleep amid the trees; a turreted white castle rises out of a sedgy island, and appears the very palace of the *Belle au Bois dormant*. These are the Pools of Commelle—pools or lakes? Pool is too small and lake too large for the good French word *étang*. They are considerable lakelets, some miles round, four in a row, connected each with each. They lie in a sheltered valley, almost a ravine, whose romantic character contrasts with the rest of the forest. Here the clipped and slender trees of Chantilly give place to an older and more stately vegetation. The gnarled roots of the beeches grip the sides of the hills with an amazing cordage, spreading as far over the sandy cliff as their boughs expand above. In the bottom of the combe, one after another, lie the four sister pools. The road winds by their side through meadows of cowslips, past the bulrushes where the swan sits on her nest, and past the clear spaces of open water, where her mate swims double on

the wave. The brink is brilliant with kingcup on a film of ladysmock. At the end of the last pool the ground rises towards the forest. There are some ruins; an old grey mill rises by the weir. The swell of the land, the grace and peace of the lake, the sedgy foreground, are exquisitely tranquil.

We return along the other track to the Sleeping Beauty's Castle—*le Château de la Reine Blanche*, as the people prefer to call it. It is no castle at all, in fact, but a small hunting-lodge belonging to the Prince de Joinville. A tradition runs that, in 1227, the mother of St. Louis had a chateau here. Six hundred years later, the last of the Condés built the chateau of to-day, with its four white turrets, the exaggerated ogives of its windows, and its steep grey roof. 'Tis the romantic Gothic of Théophile Gautier and Victor Hugo, the Gothic of 1830, more poetic than antiquarian. For all its lack of science, there is a homely grace about this ideal of our grandfathers, a scent, as it were, of dried rose-leaves, and a haunting, as of an old tune—"Ma Normandie," perhaps, or "Combien j'ai Douce Souvenance." The mill-race rushes loud under the Gothic arches. A blue lilac flowers near the hall-door. It is very silent, very peaceful, very deserted. The Castle of St. Louis would not have seemed so old-world as this.

We must make a long road home by the *Table Ronde*, or we shall not have seen the best of the Forest of Chantilly. There is still the village to visit, and the castle, and the charming country that stretches on either side of the long village street. I remember one walk we went. A row of steps leads steeply down the market-place to the banks of the Nonette, which runs demurely, as befits its name, between an overspanning arch of lofty poplars. They quite meet at the top above the narrow river. But the river is richer than it looks, and as sometimes we see a meek-faced, slender little

woman mother of some amazing Hebe of a beauty, so the small Nonette supplies the sources of yon great oblong sheet of artificial water, more than two miles long and eighty metres wide! A stone's-throw beyond the poplar walk, it glitters, it shines, it dazzles in the valley, visible from the windows of the castle on the hill. A bridge crosses the bright expanse, and leads to a beautiful meadow caught in between the water and the forest, which rises steeply here into a long low hill. There we found a score of white-bloused, bareheaded workmen, lying on the grass, dreaming away their dinner hour. Chantilly is not picturesque, but at every turn the place is full of pictures.

Before we leave, we must stroll round by the castle, with its fine old gardens planted by Le Nôtre, its vast stables, imposing as a church, its sheets of water, out of which rises, elegantly turreted, the brand-new chateau of 1880, so reminiscent of the older castles of Touraine. For once there was an older castle here, built by Jean Bullant for Anne of Montmorency. The great constable left the splendid palace to his son, and in 1632 Chantilly, as it stood among the waters and the gardens of Le Nôtre, was a thing to wonder at and envy. Here Henri, Duke of Montmorency, kept his court and filled his galleries with famous pictures. He was a great patron of the arts. His wife, the *Silvie* of the poets of her time, has left her name still, like a perfume, among the avenues and parks of Chantilly. It was a princely life; but the duke was discontented in his castle; private wealth could not console him for public woes, and he joined in the revolt of Gaston d'Orléans. He was defeated at the head of his troops, taken prisoner, and beheaded at Toulouse, by order of Cardinal Richelieu. "On the scaffold," says St. Simon, "he bequeathed one of his best pictures to Richelieu, and another to my father."

The duke was a near kinsman of the Prince of Condé. Until the last, *Silvie* had believed that this cousin, powerful and in the king's good graces, would intervene, and save her husband's life. To her surprise, Condé held his peace. The axe fell—and *Silvie* understood, when the king awarded the confiscated glories of Chantilly to Condé.

For a hundred and fifty years, Chantilly continued to be the almost Royal pleasure-house, the Versailles of the Princes of Condé. Then the great Revolution rased the castle to the ground. It was not here, but some miles away—at St. Leu-Taverny—that the last Condé died, in 1830. Chantilly, which had come into the family by a violent death, left it also in a sombre and mysterious fashion. The last Prince of Condé was found one morning hanged to the handle of his casement-window. The castle of Chantilly passed to the Duc d'Aumale. In 1840 he began the labour of restoring it; but the Revolution of 1848 sent him into exile, and only in 1872 was Chantilly restored to its rightful proprietor. Then, like a phœnix, the new castle began to rise swiftly from its nest of ash and ruin. It is as like the castle of the Renaissance, from which it descends, as a young child is like its illustrious ancestor. 'Tis a princely and elegant palace, and we find no fault with it beyond its youth. It stands with a swanlike grace amid its waters; it holds, as in the days of Montmorency, a rare treasure of old pictures and priceless manuscripts; and so far as eye can reach from its terraces, the lands and forests are subject to its lord. Chantilly is, in truth, a great possession. The Duc d'Aumale, as we know, had no sons. He died in 1897, and, choosing the most gifted men of his country for his children, he bequeathed his palace and estate of Chantilly to the Institute of France.

## III

If the day be cold or windy, drive through the forest of Hallatte to Creil, and thence take the train to Compiègne, for there blows a stiffish breeze across the plateau of the Oise. But if mild air and sun attend you, hire a light victoria, choose a good driver (you can get one to do the thing for five and twenty francs or so), and set out by Senlis and Verberie for Compiègne. 'Tis a matter of five and forty kilomètres; and to make the drive a success, you must stretch it a little further still, and go through the forest of Chantilly, round by St. Léonard, to Senlis.

Senlis is a charming little town, perched on a hill in true mediæval fashion, and grouped in a cluster round its fine cathedral and the ruins of the castle of St. Louis (a real mediæval castle, this one, at least so much as is left of it). Halfway up the hill the antique bulwarks, turned into a raised and shady walk, wear their elms and limes and beeches like flowers amid a mural crown. From this green garland the streets rise ever steeper, darker, more irregular; yet not so narrow but that here and there we spy some white half-modern house, with pots of pinks in the windows, and a garden full of flowers, which looks the natural home for some provincial heroine in a novel of Balzac's. I should like to end my days, I think, in just such a little town, to sit in my garden and receive my fair visitors under the green roof of the lime-tree walk. The notary, the sous-préfet (is there a sous-préfet?), the curé perhaps, and some of the country neighbours would come once a week to play écarté, tric-trac, and boston with each other, and chat with us in a polished little parlour, with squares of carpet in front of all the chairs. Once a week, on the afternoon consecrated by local fashion,

VIEW FROM LA MONTAGNE DE LA VERBERIE

VIEW FROM LA MONTAGNE DE LA VERBERIE

we should walk on the ramparts and meet our neighbours, talk of the crops and pull the Government to pieces (it stands a great deal of pulling!). We should shake our heads over the Conseil Municipal, but forgive the individual councillors, who are invariably amiable in private life. The terrible M. Dupont would give me a cutting of Malmaison pink for my garden, and *that* breach would be healed. . . . Stop carriage! let us begin at once, that peaceful imaginary comedy of old age. But, ah, the little white house is already out of sight. We are in front of the shattered round towers of the thirteenth-century palace, all fringed with brown wallflowers against an azure sky. We climb higher still, for see—here is the high, sunny, little square where the tall cathedral stands.

Senlis cathedral is a fine ogival building, its great porches arched around with sculptured saints and prophets. There are two towers, one of them topped by a surprising steeple, a hundred feet in height, which is a landmark for all the country round. The deep porches rich in shadow, the slender lofty towers, compose an exterior altogether simple, noble, and religious. To my thinking, Senlis, like all Gothic churches, is best seen from without. Within, that bare unending height of pillar, that cold frigid solemnity, that perfume of dreary Sabbath, is less touching than the grand yet homely massiveness of Romanesque, or even than the serene placidity of the classic revival. Who, unabashed, could say his prayers in these chill Gothic houses of the Lord, built apparently for the worship of giraffes or pelicans? Oh for the little, low-roofed chapels of St. Mark's, the unpretending grandeur of San Zenone or Sant' Ambrogio, or even the simple, pious beauty of such a Norman village church as St. Georges de Boscherville, near Rouen! Think of the quaint, sombre poetry of Notre-Dame-du-Port at Clermont-Ferrand, of Saint

Julien at Brioude, or Saint Trophime at Arles; or even remember the elegant and holy grace of the Parisian St. Etienne du Mont—these be churches in which to say one's prayers. Whereas your Northern Gothic is a marvellous poem from without; but how frigid is the chill interior of those august and noble monuments! Duty divorced from charity is not more cold; and I can easier imagine a filial and happy spirit of worship in the humblest square-towered parish church.

As it happened, we did not see the interior of Senlis at its best. The spring cleaning was in full force; the straw chairs were heaped in an immense barricade by the font. In the middle of the cathedral—and really in the middle, dangling in mid-air like Socrates in his basket—an energetic char-man was brushing the cobwebs from the sculptured capitals with a huge besom made of the dried but leafy boughs of trees. He had been hauled up there in a sort of crate by some ingenious system of ropes and pulleys. The one solitary figure in that vast cleanly interior was not unpicturesque; it was like a caricature of any picture of Mr. Orchardson's.

## IV

Senlis was the capital of our friends the Sylvanectes. Hence stretched on either hand the vast forests which even to-day are still considerable in a score of relics—the woods of Chantilly, Lys, Coye, Ermenonville, Hallatte, Compiègne, Villers-Cotterets, etc., but which in Gallo-Roman times were still one vast united breadth of forest. To-day, all round Senlis the lands are cleared, and the nearest woods, north or south, are some six miles away. We rumbled

regretfully down the hill, out towards the windy plains of Valois, windiest plains that ever were; bleak champaigns where the sough and rushing of the wind sounds louder than at sea. The forests of this northern plain are beautiful. O woods of Chantilly! O birchen glades of Coye! O deep and solemn vales of Compiègne, spinnies of Hallatte, and wavy pine-knolls of Villers-Cotterets, are ye not as a collar of green emeralds upon the breast of Mother Earth? But we must admit that, shorn of their trees, the plains of Oise have not the grandeur, the ample solemn roll, of the plains of Seine-et-Marne. 'Tis a lean, chill, flat, and as it were an angular sort of beauty; like some thin thirteenth-century saint, divinely graceful in her robes of verdure; more graceful beneath those plenteous folds than her better nourished sisters. But never choose her for your model of Venus Anadyomene. Leave her that imperial cloak of woods and forests.

We pass by fields of sun-smitten, withered pasture; by stretches of sad precocious corn, already in ear on its scanty span-high stems of green; by quarries and hamlets, into the deep wood of Hallatte; then forth again by more fields, ever bleaker, ever higher, till somehow suddenly we find ourselves on the steep brow of a down (they call it a mountain here, la Montagne de la Verberie), with below us, half seen through the poplar screens of the precipitous hill-side, a lovely blue expanse of country with the Oise lying across it like a scimitar of silver. Far away beyond the bridge, beyond the village in its meadows, depths of forest, blue and ever bluer, make an azure background that reaches out to Compiègne.

We dash down the hill and clatter along the sleepy pebbly village street, past the inn full of blouses and billiards, till the trees press thicker and thicker among the lengthening shadows. The forest is full of the peculiar soft beauty that

foreruns the summer dusk. These outskirts are fragrant with thorn-trees and acacia-trees. O white-flowering delicate mock-acacias, were I the king of France, I would multiply ye by all my high roads—for none is more beautiful to the eye and none is more majestic or more bountiful than you. Throughout that parched spring of 1893, when the hay stood withered a span high from the ground, your long green leaves served as fodder for our cattle, most succulent and sweet. And what shall I say of your blossom—delicious to every sense—an exquisite rain of white pearls, dropping fragrant perfumes on the tree, which, plucked and delicately fried in batter, make a *beignet* worthy of Lucullus? I love your black and gnarled thorny trunk, so dark in its veil of lacy green and white; and it always seems to me that the nightingale sings sweeter than elsewhere from your high and twisted branches.

Here we are still on the rim of the forest. The white may-trees, still in flower, grow in rounds and rings together on the broken ground studded with silver birch. They stand in the dusky summer stillness, very fair and sweet, their muslin skirt spread white under the gleam of the rising moon. The lanky sentimental young silver birches bend their heads above them, and sigh in the breeze. We pass—and as soon as we have passed, no doubt, they clasp their fragrant partners to their glittering breasts and whirl away in some mystic, pastoral May-dance to celebrate the spring.

But we go on, still on. The trees press closer and closer. They are now great forest-trees. The wind soughs among them in utter melancholy. Far away, here and there, a thin spectre of moonlight glides between their branches. Have you ever felt at night in some deep glade the holy horror of the forest? If not, you have no Druid and no Dryad among your ancestry. You have never known with a shudder

just how they sacrificed the victim on yonder smooth grey slab, by moonlight, to the Forest God! Think, on this very spot, the moonlight fell, even as it falls to-night, among the gleaming beeches, ere ever the Romans entered Gaul. Man has never sown or reaped his harvest on this sacred soil: it is still consecrate to the God of Forests. The beech-boughs rustle immemorial secrets; the oaks shoot up their mast-like columns to support the temple roof. And there is Something in the temple, Something vast and nameless. Something that sighs and laments and chills, super-human or anti-human, Something which has no place in any of our creeds. What is it, this obscure, religious dread, this freezing of the blood and tension of the spirit, that locks us in a holy awe amid the shades of the nocturnal forest? Who knows? Perhaps a dim unconscious memory of the rites of our ancestors, Celts or Germans; a drop of the heart's blood of the Druid or the Alruna-woman, still alive in us after two thousand years. They say that children fear the dark because they are still haunted by the dread of prowling beasts; our babies long obscurely for the blazing camp-fires which kept the wolves and bears at bay; an old anxious forest-fear survives in them and forbids them to sleep without that bright protection. Brr! . . . I wish we could see the friendly glow to-night in the wood of Compiègne!

At last, far off, there is in truth a glow as of a human beacon. 'Tis a blacksmith's forge, and then some straggling houses. Again a space of scantier wood, and we clatter up the streets of the outlying faubourg. The streets grow steeper, the houses taller, our pace quicker and more exhilarating. And at last we draw up with a clack of the whip before the famous friendly Hôtel de la Cloche at Compiègne.

## V

The market is in full swing when we throw our shutters open in the morning, and the gay wide square is full of booths and country-people, clustered round the bronze statue of Joan of Arc. (It was here, you know, we took her—worse luck to us!—at the gate of Compiègne. But it was at Rouen she made her entry, and that exit for which, alas! we stand ashamed throughout history.) Nothing could look cheerfuller than the market-place this morning. It tempts us out; and then we find that we could not see the best of it from the windows. For cheek by jowl with our hotel stands the fine Hôtel de Ville, with its fretted, Flemish-looking front and its tall belfry for the chimes. It was finished in 1510, when Louis XII. was king. There he rides, on the large arcade on the first story, every inch a king; but the statue is modern.

Gay, bright, with charming environs, Compiègne is a pleasant county town; but it has not that look of age, of historic continuity, which are the charm of smaller places, such as Crépy and Senlis. No sign is left of the great palace of the Merovingian kings, no relic of that stalwart fortress whence are dated so many of the acts of Charles the Wise; that castle of Compiègne where, says Eustache Deschamps, "Tel froid y fait en yver que c'est raige," built against the river bridge—

> "Le Chastel que se lance
> Dessus Aysne, lez le pont du rivaige."

Bit by bit one discovers, lost in the modern prosperity of the place, here and there a souvenir of the more illustrious past. Here and there, on the limits of the town, a towered wall rises in some private garden, and we recognize a fragment

VIEUX MOULIN

VIEUX MOULIN

of the fortifications raised under Joan of Arc. Certain roads in the forest were planned and laid out by Francis the First. Then there is the city gate, built by Philibert Delorme in 1552, with the initials of Henry and Diana interlaced. A few old houses still remain from the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, and among them that "Hôtel des Rats" where Henri IV. lived with Gabrielle d'Estrées in 1591. There are one or two old churches, too much restored. And then, of course, there is the great uninteresting palace, the very twin of the Palais Royal, which Gabriel built for Louis XV., and which we remember for the sake of the two Napoleons.

The charm, the attraction, of Compiègne is elsewhere. The forest here is beautiful as Fontainebleau. True, here are none of the wild romantic deserts, the piled crags hoary with juniper, the narrow gorges, and sudden summer vistas of Fontainebleau. The trees themselves have a different character. We find few of those great gnarled and hollow giants whose twisted arms make such uncanny shadows towards sunset in the Bas-Bréau. Here the oaks shoot up to an inconceivable height erect and branchless until they meet at last in a roof of verdure just tinged with April rose and gold. If Fontainebleau reminds us of a comedy of Shakespeare's, Compiègne has the noble and ordered beauty, the heroic sentiment of Racine. What solemn arches and avenues of beeches; what depths of forest widening into unexpected valleys, rippling in meadow-grass, where the hamlet clusters round its ruined abbey; what magical lakes and waters interchained, where the wooded hills shine bright in doubled beauty! Ah! Fontainebleau, after all, is a blind poet: the forest is ignorant of lake and river. But Compiègne has the Oise and the Aisne and the Automne. Compiègne has its lakes and tarns, and pools innumerable, its seven and twenty limpid brooks, its wells and ripples in

every valley-bottom. The loose soil, rich with this continual irrigation, teems with flowers. The seal of Solomon waves above the hosts of lily of the valley. The wood-strawberry and wild anemone enamel the grass with their pale stars. Here and there on the sandier slopes a deep carpet of bluebells, or at the water's edge a brilliant embroidery of kingcups, give point to the sweet monotony of white and green, which vibrates from the flowers in the grass to the flowering may-bushes, to the acacias only half in blossom, and thence more faintly to the lady birch and beech with gleaming trunks and delicate foliage. White and green appear again in the wide sheets of water amid the shimmering woods. So I shall always think of the wood of Compiègne as of some paradise, too perfect for violent hue and passionate colour—some Eden haunted only by the souls of virgins, sweet with all fresh pure scents, white with white flowers, and green with the delicate trembling green of April leaves.

## VI

Where shall we go to-day? There are many lovely drives in the forest. Champlieu has its Roman camp, its antique theatre and temple; Morienval its abbey church with the three Norman towers, St. Nicolas its priory, St. Pierre its ruins, St. Jean its marvellous old trees, and Ste. Perrine its lakes where the deer come to die. Shall I confess that we know these beauties still by rumour only? For we went first of all by the foot of Mont St. Mard to the hamlet of the old mill, and round the lakes of La Rouillie to Pierrefonds. And on the morrow, when we set out for Champlieu or St. Jean, after the first mile, we would cry to the driver, "Go

back, and take us the same drive as yesterday." And so three times we drove past the Vieux Moulin.

This is a sad confession. But, reader, if ever you visit Compiègne, go *last* to Pierrefonds, round by the Vieux Moulin, or, however long you stay, you will never see the rest.

## VII

Let us set out again for the Vieux Moulin! We are soon deep in woods of oak and beech. We pass the stately avenues of the Beaux Monts; a steeper height towers above us. See, how wonderful is this deep-green glen, where the oaks rise sheer a hundred feet and more from the sheet of lily of the valley at their feet! The picturesque declivity of the dell, the beautiful growth of the trees, the whiteness and sweetness and profusion of the flowers, the something delicate, lofty, and serious about this landscape, makes a rare impression amid the opulence of April. Our glade slopes downward from the base of Mont St. Mard; at its further extremity begins the valley of the Vieux Moulin.

It is a valley of meadow land beside a stream which, a thousand years ago, must have cut the shallow gorge in which it lies. On either side rises a line of hills, not high, but steep and wooded. There is just room in the valley for the small Alpine-looking hamlet and its hay-meadows. They are full of flowers; marsh-flowers down by the stream, with higher up, sheets of blue sage and yellow cowslip, and here and there a taller meadow-orchid. Somewhere among the flowers, out of sight, but never out of hearing, runs the stream that feeds the mill, the Ru de Berne.

The hamlet is clustered at the nearer end — perhaps a

hundred dark little houses, irregularly grouped round an odd little church with a wide hospitable verandah, all the way round it, and a quaint balconied spire. The houses are gay with climbing roses—out in flower, to my astonishment, on this 28th of April; and in their little gardens the peonies are pink and crimson. It has quite the look of a Swiss hamlet; and, if you choose, there is an "ascension" to be made! True, the Mont St. Mard can be climbed in some three-quarters of an hour; but none the less its summit boasts a matchless view. See, all the forest at our feet, with its abbeys and hamlets, and lakes and rivers, out to the blue plains streaked with woods, where Noyon and Soissons emerge like jewels circled in an azure setting. The view is quite as beautiful if we keep to the valley. The meadows grow lusher and sedgier, and the kingcup gives place to the bulrush, and the bulrush to the water-lily, till, behold, our meadows have changed into a lake, a chain of winding waters, in which the wooded hills are brightly mirrored. The road winds on between the wood and the water till we reach a long, slow, mild ascent, and at the top of it we find ourselves upon the outskirts of a little town. A sudden turn of the road reveals the picturesque village, scattered over several roundly swelling hills, but clustered thickliest round an abrupt and wooded cliff, steeper than the others, and surmounted by a huge mediæval fortress, one frown of battlements, turrets, and watch-towers behind its tremendous walls. Below the castle and the rock, and in the depth of the valley, lies a tiny lake, quite round, girdled with quinconces and alleys of clipped lime. Far away, beyond the hills, on every side, the deep-blue forest hems us in. Except Clisson in Vendée, I can think of no little town so picturesque, so almost theatric in the perfection of its *mise en scène*. And see, the castle is quite perfect, without

a scar, without a ruin! Was the wood, after all, an enchanted wood, as it seemed? Have we driven back five hundred years, into the Valois of the fourteenth century?

## VIII

Pierrefonds! It was here that a sad ne'er-do-weel (for whom I have a liking none the less) built himself this famous castle in 1391. It was the wonder of the age, too strong and too near Paris for the safety of the Crown. It was dismantled in 1617; and all that remains of the fourteenth-century fortress is, with the foundations, one side of the keep and part of the outer wall. Its restoration, begun in 1858, was the triumph of Viollet-le-Duc. Before the decoration was finished, before the last moats were dry, or the palisade laid out, the Second Empire fell; the munificent patron became an invalid in exile, and Pierrefonds was dubbed a national monument, kept from ruin, but no longer an occasion for expense. I own that I should like to have seen it before it was restored—to have seen the real, time-stained, historical document. Yet, after all, the world has a goodly harvest of ruins, of documents; and there is only one such magnificent historical novel as the Castle of Pierrefonds.

The decoration is often poor and gaudy; but architecturally Pierrefonds is a work of genius. To walk through it is to see the Middle Ages alive, and as they were: a hundred phrases of mediæval novels or poems throng our memory. See, there is the great Justice Hall, built separate from the keep, above the Salle des Gardes; and there, connecting it with the outer defences, are the galleries or *loggie*, where the knights and ladies used to meet and watch the Palm Play in the court below. Here is the keep, a

fortress within a fortress, with its postern on the open country. From its watch-towers, or its double row of battlements, we can study the whole system of mediæval defence. Ah, this would be the place to read some particularly exciting book of Froissart's—"The Campaign in Brittany," for instance, or one of those great Gascon sieges, full of histories of mining and counter-mining, of sudden sallies from the postern gate, of great engines built like towers, launching stones and Greek fire, which the enemy wheels by night against the castle wall. I am deep in mediæval strategy when a timid common-sensible voice interrupts—

"Mais comment cela se peut-il que le château soit si ancien, p'isque vous me dites qu'il fut construit sous le Second Empire?"

'Tis our fellow-sightseer, apparently some local tradesman, bent on holiday, tramping the forest with his wife, their dinner in a basket, and bunches of *muguets* dangling from their wrists. He is a shrewd little fellow. In his one phrase, he has summed up the sovereign objection to Pierrefonds—

"How can the castle be so ancient if, as you say, 'twas built under Napoleon III.?"

Decidedly Pierrefonds is too well restored!

## IX

The castle is the chief interest at Pierrefonds, but not the only one; for, down by the lake, on the overgrown and weedy promenade, there stands the *Établissement des Bains.* Here tepid sulphur springs are captured and turned to healing uses. Happy sick people, who are sent to get well in this enchanting village! How they must gossip in the lime-walk and fish in the lake, read on the castle terraces,

THE LAKES OF LA ROUILLIE

and wander in the forest! Happy sick people; for, alas! (unless one stand in need of sulphur baths) Pierrefonds, in its lovely valley, is not, they say, a very healthy place. So, at least, from Compiègne, proclaims the trump of Envy; or perhaps the imparadised Pierrefondois, eager to keep their lovely home safe from the jerry-builder, have started these vague rumours of influenza, of languor, of rheumatisms. 'Tis a wise ruse, a weapon of defence against the Parisian—a sort of sepia shot forth to protect the natural beauty of the woods against the fate of Asnières.

There are three courses open to the visitor to Pierrefonds. He may stay there, and that would certainly be the pleasantest course. Or he may take the train, and after little more than half an hour arrive at Villers-Cotterets, where he will sleep, reserving for the morrow the lovely drive through the forest to Vaumoise, and the visit to the quaint old high-lying town of Crépy en Valois, whence the train will take him on to Paris. Crépy is a dear old town. No one would think that such a dull disastrous treaty once was signed there. The road that slopes down from Crépy to the plain is full of a romantic, almost an Umbrian picturesqueness. We drove there once, years ago, and visited the knolly forest full of moss and pines. But we have never seen Villers-Cotterets; for when we were at Pierrefonds we followed the third and worst course open to us: we drove back to Compiègne, and thence we took the train direct to Paris.

## Part II

### 1901

Never again have I visited Pierrefonds or the woods of Compiègne. They lie an hour or so from Paris by the rail, but still to me they seem as inaccessible as fairyland. Sometimes, on a fine morning at Eastertide, a longing goes through me to start for those tall glades of oak, with the road that runs right through them to the lovely Vieux Moulin. But, to tell the truth, I have not dared ; I doubt not, at the back of my heart, that village, forest, hill, and lake, have long since crumbled into ashes.

Years later, it was my fate, however, to return to Chantilly. The time was midwinter ; January wrapped the earth in a shroud of snow and ice. But even in midwinter there still beats in copse and wold a heart of life too deep and sound for any frost to touch it. Not a flower, not a leaf, enlivened the forest ; but how large and frequent seemed the forest-birds relieved against that dazzling steppe! The green woodpeckers, hopping about, two or three of them together, appeared (although, in fact, not more than fourteen inches long) as large and bright as parrots. This fine bird, the *pivert* of France where it is common, ever excites my admiration, so graceful is its shape, from the long bill to the slender somewhat drooping tail, so bright is its colouring—

a mantle of moss green, a breast of greenish yellow, some yellow feathers in a tail of chequered brown and white, and a coif like a jewel, ruby-red, blood-red, drawn close over head and neck. In England I have never seen him, though I believe the bird exists with us ; nor, though I sometimes find him in my Cantal orchards, have I ever seen the *pivert* so much to his advantage as during that cold week in January, relieved against a vast expanse of snow. The winter that year was unusually hard. The pools of Commelle were all fast bound in ice ; the snow lay heaped beneath the lacy boughs of the beech roots twisted on their banks. Silent and deserted stood the castle of Queen Blanche. On every twig and branch of the woods glittered a spray of diamond dewdrops frozen hard. Brilliant, still, and white, the great forest stretched all round us, like an enchanted place where no one lived but we, until, as we reached the third pool of the chain, we suddenly found that we were not alone : a company of wild ducks had alighted on the ice, still disposed, as when they fly, in a long straggling V, and stood shuffling incessantly their webbed feet as if to warm them on that bitter floor.

One other day, too, I remember. It was warmer ; a thaw had set in ; a light white mist enveloped everything. We walked on the common as in a world of cotton-wool. Suddenly, a few feet away, a pack of hounds, in full cry, broke out of the moist damp mist ; we saw them for a yard or two, and then the fog engulphed them anew. The bright coats of the *piqueurs*, in a vision of horses, kept appearing and disappearing. It was the Duke of Chartres' meet. Chantilly is a cheerful place in winter. The Orleans princes, the Barons de Rothschild, with a bevy of local nobility and gentry, are bent on the pleasures of the chase. It is a land of races, too. In many a corner of the woods you may come upon a set of training stables with, hard by, a

queer little sham-Gothic villa, which looks as if it came from Leamington, emblazoned with its English name—Rose Cottage or Ivy Lodge. In every lane you come across the pale, stunted English jockeys, pacing their thoroughbreds. More than once as they rode by, I saw the stalwart peasants in their blouses glance up with a jest from their work at the saw-mill or the woodpile, half contemptuous of the jockeys' wizened youth, half content that their money should enrich the country-side. And I thought of that long-forgotten France where, for so many decades, the English lads rode by, slim and haughty, and the French peasants chuckled "*Levez votre queue, levez!*" being persuaded that the English had tails like monkeys, in those sad old times of the Hundred Years' War.

On the fourth day the sun rose dazzling. We walked in the *taillis* where the wood-cutters were hard at work. The forest of Chantilly is almost all planted in *taillis composé* with hornbeam, elm, and oak—three species which, however often you may fell them, will rise again from the roots, apparently immortal. Each tree in the coppice as it reaches thirty years is marked for the axe, with the exception of a reserve, drawn from the finest subjects, which is permitted to fulfil its natural growth, and affords a permanent covert for the rest. Such is a *taillis composé* or *taillis sous futaie*—perhaps the most profitable crop that can be drawn from a soil too stiff or too light for the ordinary purposes of agriculture. The hornbeam and the beech are the best of all woods for burning; the oak is their rival, and commands several markets as ship-timber, building-wood, cabinetmaker's oak, props for mines, or logs for burning. The leaves, too, are a source of profit; for dead leaves in France serve almost all the purposes of straw, and stuff a mattress, or litter a stable, or manure the kitchen garden.

I love these feathery woods and coppices of France. A long, low, cliff-like hill, with a landslip at the foot; a pasture sloping to the river; a spinny or *taillis* in the middle distance:—there is a landscape which you may see on any day in any part of France; and I ever find it full of a delicate yet homely grace. But, for beauty and wonder, the *haute futaie* is incomparably finer than the copse. In the *futaie* the trees are left to grow to their natural shape, the axe serving only to weed out the misshapen trunks, or to eliminate the intrusive birch and poplar which push unbidden among the better sort. Here, at least, the oak and beech, adult, with a century and a half behind them, fall only in their prime, the rich prize of the woodman's axe, which still respects the elect reserve. Compiègne, Fontainebleau, St. Germain, have all their *futaies;* but few private owners can afford to wait a hundred and fifty years for their reward (which, indeed, is princely when it comes due), or have so vast a property that, during more than a century, some part of it may fall every winter to the axe in due rotation. For who can boast a hundred and fifty groves, duly planted and tended year after year? Perhaps the State alone. A third system, much used in parks and woods round houses, as combining use and ornament, is that of *jardinage.* Here, as in an earthly paradise, trees of all ages grow together, and every year the axe takes its toll of young and old alike: yon great fir may boast two centuries, and here is yesterday's sapling at its feet. The fir and the beech are generally grown *en jardinage.*

Hark, the sharp tang of the axe! Let us go and see. There is an art in wood-cutting, especially in felling a *taillis;* for if the wound be not clear and sharp, if the least uneven crevice or hollow let the rain sojourn and sodden in the stump, the root will lose its virtue. But the woodman knows

his trade. He was born in our woods, most likely; if not, ten to one he comes from the Belgian Ardennes, perhaps from Bavaria: be sure he is a sylvan; mixed with his blood is the sap of the forest. There, under that spreading oak, he has built his hut of tree-trunks: long perches of young oaks covered by sods of earth, with the grass turned inwards. Let us peep in. A pile of dead bracken occupies one corner. Three stout poles, planted in the beaten earth which forms the floor, are tied together at the top, and support a great iron soup-pot, swinging over a fire of braise, under the hole in the roof. There is no window, hardly a door. Evidently our woodman is a bachelor.

For in the forest of St. Germains I know another hut which is the very pride and pink of neatness. The woodman's wife used to sit there, on a deep bench of turf built against her rustic house, mending the week's wash, while her children played at her feet. The hut itself, though built, as usual, of trunks and sods, was pleasant to look at, with a neat white-curtained window in a frame of deal set in the wall of logs; a door of the same pattern swung on a pole passed through a double set of iron loops. Door and window were evidently portable, and had been used on many a clearing. Within, a folding table, a stool or two, and even some canvas folding chairs such as are used in gardens, gave the rough place a look of comfort. A wide truckle-bed supported a mattress of sacking, stuffed, no doubt, with forest leaves; a red blanket covered the whole. A stock-pot simmered above a portable iron stove. Sometimes the good woman would do her cooking, as she always did her week's washing, out-of-doors, and then—ye sylvan deities!—what savoury fumes would rise from that huge *marmite!* It was, no doubt (for so she said), a jay or so, perhaps a squirrel (the peasants here account them dainty eating), which so tickled our

PIERREFONDS

appetite in passing. And yet I could have sworn to the aroma of a hare, a pheasant, some piece of good wild game. Since no trade is warranted to breed perfection, let me admit that my friends the woodmen are nearly always past-masters in the noble art of poaching. How should it be otherwise? Only on Sundays can they tramp to the nearest village to buy, with their scanty pence, their flitch of bacon and their bag of meal. The cow, which their children lead to pasture in the glades, affords them milk, but that is all. And meanwhile the woodland teems with life. So poor, remote from all society, cognizant of the ways of bird and beast, shall they mark unmoved the traces of the hare, note with a disinterested eye the break a fawn has made in yonder brushwood, or that thick splash of mud on the ridgy pine-trunks, where the wild boar last night stopped to scratch his miry flanks, on his road to the nearest turnip-field? Meanwhile the man hungers, and the children need their daily bread.

Who does not remember a charming page of Gustave Droz, which tells how a young couple, surprised by a thunderstorm in the forest, took shelter in the charcoal-burner's hut, and shared their savoury mess? Such luck has never been mine. It was one of the things for which I envied my revered and admirable friend, M. Taine, whose childhood, spent on the edge of a great forest, made him familiar with every sylvan thing.

"In these old forests," he writes, in an essay on the Ardennes, "there lingers a race of men still half savage; they are the woodcutters. They scarcely know the taste of bread; a side of bacon, some potatoes, a little milk, compose their daily fare. I have spent the night with them in huts without a window. The large, low, open chimney let in the daylight and let out the smoke. There the meat was hung to dry. The children spoke scarce a word of

French, expressing themselves in a rude *patois;* wild as young colts, they roamed the forest all day long; when they reached their twelfth year, their father put an axe in their hands, and they chopped the branches of the fallen trees; a few years later, they felled an oak like him. A mute animal life, full of legends and strange beliefs, was theirs."

But all this was sixty years ago. Nowadays the children are supposed to go, at least sometimes and when convenient, to the nearest village school (for education is compulsory in France); the young men inevitably serve their time at the regiment; the girls enter domestic service. And so difficult is it to find recruits for the woodman's free but rough and lonely life, that the lack of woodcutters is becoming a grave question among foresters in France.

When March is well out, and the trees are felled, when the wood is piled in stacks, the woodman consults the sky, and, on the first soft mild and sappy morning, he begins to bark his oaks, or at least such of them as are devoted to that tragic end. It is a nice and delicate business, which must be undertaken before the leaves are green. For, while the sap is springing, the bark and the wood are separated by a layer of viscuous vegetable tissue, the cambium, but so soon as the foliage is full-formed, this cambium turns hard and welds the two together. Yet the weather must be warm; a blast of cold wind, the shadow of too black a cloud, by suddenly lowering the temperature, may at any moment interrupt the operation: the bark will not strip from the oak. The woodman (who knows nothing of this capricious cambium, worse than a woman for yielding only at its pleasure) swears that a herd of sheep must have passed to his windward, and throws down his axe, well aware, despite his false premises, that no more stripping will be done that day. He must wait on sun and zephyr. The next

warm day he returns, cuts a sharp ring round the foot of the tree, another at his right arm's topmost reach, and rips the bark in long ribbons, which he lays in the sun to dry, face downward, for a day and a night, ere he stack them for the tanner. That is the prime bark, flayed from the living trunk; having taken this, he fells the oak, and strips as best he can the upper branches.

Woodcutter, bark-stripper, he turns planter next, and, where the natural fruit of the trees has not sufficiently renewed the glade, he hoes the earth, relieves it from the stifling moss and turf, digs a deep hole, and plants a sapling. By early autumn he must change his trade anew; in September the woodman becomes a charcoal-burner. The suns of August have dried last winter's logs; they are ready for the next metamorphosis. The woodcutter, who knows by heart each glade and clearing and coppice of the forest, selects some open space, far from the century-old revered Reserve, and cuts the turf from a chosen circle. Having beaten hard the ground, he plants in the middle three or four stout stakes and swathes them together; round these he sets some light inflammable brushwood; beyond this centre —which will serve as a chimney—he places his logs in close rings, standing straight on end in the middle, then slantwise more and more, till they are almost flat at the edge. And now the stack takes on the shape of a great flattish cake or pie. Thereon he packs a layer of dead leaves, four inches thick, and over that again a layer of sand and sods, till, save for a small open space in the middle, the whole is tightly roofed. At last he casts a flaming brand into the brushwood at the core, and waits: in an instant the faggots crackle, the smoke rises up thick and yellow, the sand and earth of the crust begin to ooze and "sweat," as they say, from the sap and moisture of the buried logs. Now let the woodman

look to the wind, lest too strong a blast cause the pile to burn too quickly, ruin the charcoal, and endanger the forest. If a sudden gale should rise, he will build a screen of branches and break the force of its impact; and all this while the fire burns steadily, smoking and sweating, until—on the third day, as a rule—a faint wreath alone of bluish vapour curls lightly from the exhausted pile. After a few days more the mound may be unpacked; if all be well, the charcoal is ready for sale. The sylvan year has run its course. Our woodman is a woodcutter again.

Forestry in France is not only an art, a science, an industry, and a passion. Several generations of savants such as M. Bouquet de la Grye—to whom, with all who love the woods, I owe a debt, here gladly acknowledged—have reduced the rule of forestry to a method. Thanks to them, the returns are as sure, the cultivation as regular, as in any other branch of agriculture. If I had been a man, I would, I think, have been a forester; not a woodman, but an inspector of woods and waters, like Jean de la Fontaine, riding all day long under the green and musical covert, among the fresh scents of herb and leaf and resin, sleeping at night in the forest-warden's lodge, deciding the destinies of oak and beech and pine. At Nancy there is an *Ecole Forestière*, which forms to this kindly calling the pupils of the Agronomic Institute. Thence sometimes, or else from Stuttgard, we used to draw our foresters for the vast woods of India, until, in 1884, a School of Forestry was established at Cooper's Hill.

The last years of the nineteenth century, the first of this, have brought the youth of France back, with a sort of passion, to the land. In Shakespeare's time, as we know,

> "Young gentlemen in France
> Were wont to sigh and look as black as night
> From very wantonness."

I am glad to think that in our days they are at once more cheerful and more practical. Cheesemaking, cattle-farming, wine-growing, farming, forestry, are all enterprises which a young gentleman may pursue with credit, and even with enthusiasm. And forestry, at least, is cultivated as it never was before. Until the last hundred years, more or less, a forest was just a wood-mine, to be worked until the vein should be exhausted. But now we sow and tend even more than we destroy. We are like provident children who seek to repair the ruin wrought by a generation of prodigals. I have before my eyes the statistics for the expense which the forests of France have cost the State between 1882 and 1902: they average some three and a half million of francs per annum. The foresters of France find such a sum the miserable pension of a miser, and men of science bid us plough, and plant, and fence in our hillsides, unless we be prepared to see their rocky flanks ravined by headlong torrents, and the plains at their feet alternately a quagmire and a Sahara. The course of rivers, the distribution of rains, the maintenance of mountains in their magnificent integrity, all depend upon the deep-draining roots, the rain-absorbing foliage of our woods. The French Revolution, in order to supply the peasants with a great expanse of arable land, set the axe in the forests of France. Liancourt wrote in 1802, on his return from exile, that, all round his estates, the great woods which covered that portion of the Oise had been cut down or rooted up—an excess of deforestation which had already produced disastrous effects upon the climate. He preached in the desert; content with their new fields of corn and beet (astonishingly productive, like all virgin soil), the peasants of the Oise would not hear of replanting; where the woods had been merely felled and not uprooted, the shepherds drove their flocks of sheep and goats, fattening

them on the young shoots which should have renewed the forest. But to-day we are wiser: we plant. Sandy moors and heaths, desolate stretches of barren chalk, are planted with the hardy sylvan pine, and shortly become things of se and beauty in themselves, no less than happy influences on the local climate. The pine gives deal and resin, and grows in any soil. Clays too stiff and damp for corn or turnip will rear the glorious and profitable oak; the steepest flanks and scaurs of the fell-side are sufficient for the beech; the elm and the ash spring in small spinnies on almost any sterile field, and their leaves afford a delicious food for cattle, a crop as regular and as nourishing as hay. Any wood, treated with care and method through a space of years, will yield a good return for careful husbandry.

And this, I think, is the special beauty of France—her great and increasing stretches of woodland. Be they the merest coppices of scrub oak and horn-beam, yet are they haunted by the birds, starred in spring with primroses and dog-violets, oxlips and white wood-strawberries. And what tongue shall declare the majesty of the forest? I love the great freedom of the wild high mountain-pastures, I admire the rich harvest of the lowland plain; but something deeper and more secret—dating from the days before our ancestors were nomad shepherds or farmers on a forest-clearing—a thrill primæval, is awakened in me by the rustle of the woods.

# A LITTLE TOUR IN PROVENCE

# A LITTLE TOUR IN PROVENCE

1892

## I

OUR first impression of Provence struck us just beyond Mondragon. For some miles we had traversed the romantic valley of the Rhone, which at this point might almost be the valley of the Rhine. The river is hedged in by tall cliffs covered with ruins as steep and as uninhabitable as the granite which supports them. Every mountain bears its castle and tells of feudal rule, of brigand oppression, with all the violence and picturesqueness of a mediæval tale by Sir Walter Scott. The train carried us through a narrow gully, with barely room in it, above the strangled river, for the ledge on which the rails are laid. Suddenly, at the other end of the gorge, the climate changes: the air is milder, the plain more fertile, the country widens into a great amphitheatre enclosed between the Alps of Dauphiné and the rounder hills of the Cévennes. And here, with the suddenness of magic, the first olives begin—no stripling trees, but gnarled and branching orchards, sunning their ancient limbs on every southern slope. In the twinkling of an eye we have come into the kingdom of the South. With a deep breath of the sharp-scented sunny air, we inhale the beauty of it, and

understand—how intimately!—that horror of high mountains which has distinguished every race capable of appreciating beauty. Our recollection of the black gorge, the barren peaks, the swirling torrent, renders still keener our feeling for the fertile plain where the blood-red boughs of the Judas-tree make their deep southern blots of colour against the blue of the delicate, serrated hills behind. Among the fields the pollard mulberries gleam like baskets of golden filigree, in the splendour of their early April leaf. The tall pastures are white with starry jonquils, bending all one way in the wind. The hedges are sweet with hawthorn, great southern bloom, almost as big and plump as apple-blossom. And the same delicious contrast of delicacy and abundance which strikes us in the plain, surrounded by its peaks and barren hills, is repeated in the difference between this riot of blossom and the austerity of the foliage, much less green than in the north. The ilex spreads its cool grey shadow at the homestead door. Every little red-tiled farm, every vineyard, is screened by its tall hedge of cypress, a sheer wall of blackish green, planted invariably north-west of the building. For through those narrow gorges of Mondragon, where there seemed scarcely room for the train and the river, the Mistral also passes, like a blast from a giant's bellows—the Mistral, the terrible north-western wind, that devastates these plains of Paradise.

## II

Our first halting-place is Orange, a white and charming little town, filling up its ancient girdle with many an ample space of green garden and lush meadow. Few towns appear more provincial than this charming Orange, which gave

William the Silent to the cause of the Reform, a dynasty to Holland, and a king to England. There were princes in Orange long before the Nassau: there was the House of Baux, with its pretensions to the Empire of the East; there was the House of Adhémar, which brought forth the noble Guillaume d'Orange, the peer of Charlemagne. Of all their glory naught remains save one meagre wall, one tumbling buttress surmounting the hill above the city. Compared with the beautiful amphitheatre beneath, still important and majestic as in the days of the Roman occupation, these remains of chivalry appear little more venerable than the ruins of the jerry-built villas of some demolished London suburb. Yet as we look at them an emotion awakes in our heart and a mist comes before our eyes that Roman antiquity does not evoke. For the monuments of the Middle Ages are other than of stone.

And we remember how, in the beautiful old romance of *Guillaume d'Orange,* the unhappy hero comes home to his castle wounded, after Roncesvalles, the only living knight of all his host, and sounds the horn that hangs before the castle gate. But the porter will not admit him: none may enter in the absence of the master, and no man of all his garrison recognizes the hero in this poor man, suddenly aged and pinched and grey, seated on a varlet's nag, with nothing martial in his mien. Their discussion brings the Countess on to the battlements: "*That*—my husband! My husband is young and valiant. My husband would come a conqueror, leading tribes of captives, covered with glory and honour." Then, seated still on his poor nag, outside his inaccessible castle, the Count of Orange tells the story of Roncesvalles, and how he alone escaped the carnage of that day. "Less than ever my husband!" cries the Countess. "My husband would not have lived when all

those heroes died." But at last he persuades her that he is in very truth himself, and she consents to take him and tend his wounds on his promise that, so soon as he can ride to battle, he will set forth again, to avenge the death of all his comrades.

"Le monde est vide depuis les Romains," said St. Just. Beneath the ruins of that castle on the hill there stands, erect, eternal, built into the very frame-work of the cliff, the immense theatre of the Romans, still fit for service, resonant to every tone. Frequently, of late years, many thousands of people have gathered in the Amphitheatre, which serves on all great municipal occasions. But I prefer it as we saw it yesterday—its sweep of steps graciously mantled in long grass growing for hay, and full of innumerable flowers; its stage tenanted by bushes of red roses and white guelder roses; the blue empty circles of its wall-space outlined serenely against the flame-blue sky. Never have I seen the huge strength of Roman antiquity appear more sweetly venerable, more assimilable to the unshaken granite structure of the globe itself, than thus, decked and garlanded with the transitory blossoms of its eighteen-hundredth spring.

The front wall of the theatre is about one hundred feet in height, thirteen feet thick, and more than three hundred feet in length. The colony of Arausio was an important colony, remembered only now by the monuments of its pleasures and its triumph. When we shall have disappeared for near two thousand years, what will remain to tell our story? Our Gothic churches are immense and beautiful, but already, in their infancy of nine or seven centuries, they are falling into ruin. Our castles will go the way of the Castle of Orange; and of our pleasure-houses the oldest that I remember is the little flimsy seventeenth-century theatre of Parma, already quite a miracle of cardboard antiquity. We

have built too high, or too thin, or too delicately. We have read too long in our prayer-books that here we have no abiding city. Our souls have no capacity to imitate that great solid souvenir of civic use, of pleasure, of triumph, which the Romans have left behind them in all their provinces. About ten minutes' walk from the theatre, on the other side of Orange, stands the Roman Arch of Triumph, the most beautiful in Gaul. It is perfect in its great perspective, as it rises from the meadow-grass at the end of a shadowy avenue. On its sculptured sides the trophies of ancient battle are still clear, and on its frieze the violent struggle of men in battle—

"Et tristis summo captivus in arcu."

The Romans have left behind them in Provence not only a series of unalterable monuments, but the type of their race. Up country, in the little farms, a Celtic strain prevails, but in every town we find the square-built Roman frame and classic features.

We end our afternoon by a long drive through the fertile plain of Orange, all the brighter for the severeness of its setting, for the spires and hedges of cypress, for the gaunt dim blue of the distant mountains. The spring is luxuriant and ample here. The hedges toss their fragrant boughs of may: the Japanese peonies are pink in every garden, the quince-orchards seem a bower of tiny roses, the purple flags are out by all the watercourses: but the prettiest sight of all is on the grass. Even in Italy I have never seen such hay-meadows, with their great golden trails of buttercups, their sheets of snow-white narcissus, springing innumerable and very tall above the grass. There are little children and boys, and tall young girls, grown women and men of all ages, in the fields gathering great posies of

the delicious flowers. Never have I seen so bright a picture of the sheer joy of living, the mere gladness of the spring's revival. It seems to us that we have driven by some happy byway into the Golden Age, into some idyl of old Greece.

## III

Here the towns are set as close together as the jewels in a crown. We have scarcely left Orange before we see, beyond the green belt of the Rhone, the mediæval outline of the Palace of the Popes. *L'Ile Sonnante,* as Rabelais called it, rises out of the plain and the water like an island indeed, much as our own little Rye stands up out of the Sussex marshes. With its steeples and convents, its towers and buttresses, massed round the tremendous fortress on the central rock, girdled by an outer circle of crenelated ramparts, this fair town of Avignon appears the very sanctuary of the Middle Ages.

The great interest of Avignon is that it appears a town of one time—a flower of the fourteenth century still full of life and vigour. The tower of Philippe le Bel at Villeneuve dates from 1307; the great Palace of the Popes, the fortifications of the town, with their battlements and machicolations, and the vast round yellow fortress of St. André, massive against its background of olive-coloured hills—all these, and many smaller relics, belong to the second half of the fourteenth century. Even here in the South, few cities can show so many or such pure examples of the military architecture of the time.

The city wall of Avignon, since in part destroyed, had, when I saw it, a circumference of about fifteen thousand

THE PALACE OF THE POPES AT AVIGNON

THE PALACE OF THE POPES AT AVIGNON

feet. It stood twelve metres in height. It had thirty-five towers, many turrets, was crowned with battlements, and pierced with machicolations. These last, as every one knows, are open spaces left between the wall and the frieze of arcades which supports the balcony intended for the garrison (the *chemin de ronde*), spaces which form great oblong holes in the flooring of the balcony, and through which boiling water, flaming tow, lighted oil, arrows, stones, and other missiles might be poured down on assailants engaged in undermining the foot of the wall. The walls of Avignon, substantial as they appeared, would have been but a phantasmal protection against a good mitrailleuse: the modern town wore them as an ornament, and not as armour. The gates, dismantled of their old portcullises, served for the collection of the toll, and the officials of the *octroi* lodged in the romantic gatehouses. One of these guardians, moved by our interest in his unusual dwelling, led us up through his kitchen and bedroom in the gate-tower, on to the balcony that crowns the wall. He left us there in company with his wife and several babies, whom I expected, at every instant, to tumble through the holes of the machicoulis; they showed, however, the address and ingenuity of true mediæval babyhood in avoiding these pitfalls, and appeared to find the superannuated battlements an admirable playground. Less adroit, we found the *chemin de ronde* very dizzy walking; and our interest in this relic of military architecture was chequered by the fear of being precipitated into space.

The walls of Avignon were less interesting than its vast central fortress. It is difficult to imagine a monument so irregular, so labyrinthine, such a mere sombre maze of towers and walls, of corridors and staircases. Not a tower is absolutely square, not an angle true, not a communication

simple or direct. All is unexpected, dædal, disconcerting, in this gigantic relic of an era of confusion.

For the Palace of the Popes was not only a palace, but a stronghold. It was a necessary answer to the fortress which, in 1307, the King of France had built at Villeneuve across the Rhone; it was necessary also for defence against the troops of marauders who infested France after Crécy and after Poitiers. We remember how, in 1357, a knight, by name Sir Reynold of Cervole, commonly known as the Archpriest, scoured all Provence with a company of men-at-arms of all countries, who, since the King of France was captive and their arrears unpaid, turned brigands, and made a good thing of escalading castles, and ransoming rich and timid cities. Froissart has told us how the Archpriest and his men laid siege to Avignon, striking terror into the hearts of Innocent VI. and his cardinals. At last, the Papal Court agreed to pay forty thousand crowns to the company, as an inducement towards its withdrawal. The brigand-chief came to terms as regards the money, but he demanded certain small additions to the contract, for he remembered that he was not a mere marauder, but a person of good family, with other claims to consideration. He exacted, therefore, a free pardon for all his sins, and several invitations to dinner. The Pope and his cardinals "received him as reverently as if he had been the son of the King of France himself." Then he consented to lead his followers elsewhere; and after his departure the Pope considerably improved the fortifications of Avignon.

By 1370 the city was strong enough to set such besiegers at defiance, and the palace had grown into the fortress we admire to-day. It is composed of seven huge *corps de logis*, separated by courts or quadrangles; and these are riveted to each other by seven immense and sombre towers. The

whole forms a parallelogram of over twelve thousand square yards. It is an imposing, a tremendous pile—not beautiful, but unforgettable; conspicuous by the rare height of its walls and towers, and by the extraordinary upleap of its buttresses, which shoot right up the wall to the balcony, and form the great arcade which masks the largest *machicoulis* that I have ever seen. Not only pitch and Greek fire, but great beams and boulders could pass through these openings to crush the assailant underneath. Such a fortress appears impregnable to the eye: the height of the walls renders an escalade impossible; the garrison on the balcony atop is out of bowshot, and the huge buttresses defend the base against the sapper. At one-third of its height the wall supports a second balcony, whence the besieged could deal deadly damage on their assailants.

Within, the palace is disfigured by its present use as a barracks. The vast halls are ceiled over at mid-height and turned into dormitories. Nearly all the frescoes, painted in the melancholy, elegant manner of Simone Memmi and the Sienese, have been disfigured within this century. There is a party in Avignon naturally indignant at this defacement, which is all for buying the palace from the Government and turning it into a museum. This, however, would cost a great deal of money. And, as a mere impression, the great bare dædal building, gay with the crowded life of these youths of twenty, who race up and down stairs in noisy troops, or sit in the shadowy window-seats (picturesque figures in their white undress, black haversacks and deep-red caps), or fill the sombre quads with march and drill—yes, as a mere impression, it is certainly more appropriate as it is.

## IV

"Sur le pont d'Avignon
Tout le monde danse, danse;
Sur le pont d'Avignon
Tout le monde danse en rond."

Many generations of children have doubtless wondered why. Make an effort to cross the Rhone when the wind is blowing, and you will arrive, at any rate, at *one* explanation. O masterly wind! *Vent magistral*, or *mistral*. With what a round, boisterous, over-mastering force you blow from the north-west! How you send the poor passengers of Avignon-bridge whirling in all directions, dancing to all tunes, battling comically and ineffectually against you! Men used to say that beautiful Provence were a Paradise, had it not suffered from three scourges: the Parliament, the Durance and the Mistral. The local Parliament exists no more (and we regret it), the Durance is no longer a curse, but a blessing, and serves to irrigate a thousand parched and fruitful southern fields. But the *mistral* remains. We ourselves were nearly blown from the hill-top at Villeneuve; yet I can cherish no rancour against the *mistral*, the tyrant, who sweeps us all out of his way as he rushes, wreathed in dust, towards the sea. 'Tis a good honest wind, like our west-country sou'-wester, and quite devoid of the sharp, thin, exasperating quality of the east wind of our isles. And, but for the *mistral*, they never would have planted those dark long screens of soaring cypress which streak so picturesquely the wide blue prospects of Provence.

## V

There is something Athenian in the little literary class of Avignon, and in the evident pride and joy which all the citizens take in it. Our cabman stopped us in the street: "Look at that monsieur! Look at him. He's a poet!" cried the good man in great excitement. It was M. Félix Gras. People waylay you to point out the name of Aubanel or Roumanille written over a bookshop. Every person of every degree treasures some little speech or anecdote concerning M. Mistral, the hero of the place. Doubtless the Félibrige, with the little extra romance and importance which it has given to the South, has much to do with this literary enthusiasm. In Provence, a taste for poetry is a form of patriotism, even as it was in Ireland in the days of the "Spirit of the Nation"—as it is again to-day. The sentiment, which is pretty and touching, appears quite genuine.

We had forgotten that Roumanille was dead (as was natural, since poets never die), and so we made a pilgrimage to his bookshop. We were greeted by a dark-eyed little lady; when we asked for the poet, the tears started into her fine black eyes, and we realized, with a tightening of the heart, the cruel carelessness of our question. But Mademoiselle Roumanille (for it was she), with the beautiful courtesy of her nation, would not let us depart in this unhappy mood. She talked sweetly and seriously of her brother's latter days and of his death-bed, cheerful and courageous as the last pages of the "Phædo": these Provençal poets have a classic temper in their souls! He would not let them wear a mournful face. "Life is a good thing," said he; "chequered, no doubt, with melancholy

moments, but none the less bright and excellent as a whole. We have come now to one of these melancholy passages, but, believe me, my friends, the sadness of death is greatly overrated! There is nothing cruel or tragic to lament about. Life has been very good, and now—at the end of it—death comes in its place, not unkind."

So the good Félibre passed away, mindful, no doubt, of that passage in one of his poems where he says—but I have forgotten the words—

> "Now let me depart in peace,
> For I have planted in Provence
> A tree that shall endure."

If even the gay, the cordial Roumanille gave out at the last this savour of antique philosophy, the likeness of Mistral to the elder poets is far more striking. He is the Provençal Theocritus, and his poems, with their delightful literalness of touch, their unforced picturesqueness and natural simplicity, will probably endure when more striking monuments of our nineteenth-century literature are less read than remembered. We cannot imagine, at any distance of time, a Provence in which some posy of Mistral's verses will not be treasured. He will be to the great province what Joachim du Bellay has been to Anjou. True, he has written too much, but posterity is an excellent editor, and reduces the most voluminous among us to a compendious handful. Mistral is the greatest of the Félibres, and perhaps the only one whose works will survive the charming *Davidsbund* of poets and patriots which so loudly fills the public ear to-day.

We went more than once to see the great man in his garden at Maillane, a pleasant place surrounding a cool, quiet villa, where the poet lives with his young wife. It is the only house of any pretensions in Maillane, and to the

good people of the commune Monsieur Mistral is both the poet and the squire. He comes out to receive you—a strikingly handsome man with a beautiful voice; so much like the once-famous Buffalo Bill in his appearance that one day, when the two celebrities met by accident in a Parisian café, they stared at each other, bewildered for one moment, and then, rising, each advanced towards the other and shook hands! We talked of many things, and among others, of course, of Félibrige. I ventured to ask him the meaning of the name, which is a puzzle not to philologists alone. He confessed that it had no particular meaning; that on that day in May, in 1854, when he and Roumanille and the other five discussed their projected Provençal renaissance, one of them reminded the others of a quaint old song, still sung in out-of-the-way Provençal villages: a canticle in honour of certain prophets or wise men dimly spoken of as

"Les félibres de la Loi."

No one knew precisely what the word designed—so much the greater its charm, its suggestiveness! The name was adopted by acclamation; and henceforth, at any rate, the meaning of Félibre is clear.

## VI

We went the next day, in company with Mistral and his charming, intelligent wife, to see the races at St. Remy. "Regardez nos fillettes!" said the poet. "On dirait des statues Grecques." A Greek statue is severer in its beauty; but certainly the girls of St. Remy might be the sisters of the statuettes of Tanagra: so dignified, so graceful, do they appear in the beautiful costumes of Arles. They were the great adornment of these mild provincial sports, as we

watched them come in troops from Maillane and Tarascon, from Avignon, from Arles, all dressed in the plain-falling skirt, the fichu of pure fresh tulle, and the long pointed shawl, or "Provençale," which recalls the graceful garb of the Venetian women. Sometimes the skirt is pale pink or apricot, with a dove-coloured shawl, or green with a lilac shawl; but, as a rule, the skirt and shawl alike are black, relieved only by the narrow muslin apron, which reaches to the hem of the skirt before, and by the abundant fulness of the white fichu across the breast. Every one who has been to a fancy ball recalls the charming coiffure which surmounts this costume—the thick wavy black tresses, parted in the middle of the brow, taken down either side of the face loosely, then suddenly raised from the nape of the neck high at the back of the head, coiled round there and fixed under a tiny band of white lace, and a large bow or sash of black ribbon. Few head-dresses are at once so irresistible and so dignified, and none could be better suited to the regular features, ample beauty, and melting eyes of the daughters of Provence.

We fell in love with St. Remy: we stayed there for a week, in the Hotel du Cheval Blanc, where the long dark convent-like corridors and the cypress-screens behind the house give one already, as it were, a waft of Italy. St. Remy is a delightful little place. All its streets are avenues of great zebra-trunked century-old plane-trees, garlanded in April with quaint little hanging balls, or else of wych-elms, gay with pinkish-buff blossoms, and yet so gnarled and hollow that they might almost be those famous elms which Sully planted about the towns of France. "La Ville Verte" the people call it, and never was name better chosen. Even as at Orange, the town has shrunk within its ancient girdle, and has filled out its space with gardens, with

THE CASTLE OF BEAUCAIRE AT TARASCON

orchards, with hay-meadows. The gardens of St. Remy are the fortune of the place, and owe to their happy situation behind the range of the Alpines an earlier harvest of flowers and fruit than elsewhere, even in the sunny South. An acre of carnations of St. Remy is a fortune to a man, as profitable as an acre of asparagus at Monteuil or early peas at Plougastel. If the mountains behind us, so lovely in their lilac bareness, were duly forested and covered to the crown with pine and ilex, we could imagine no happier situation. But the hills of Provence are as unthrifty as they are beautiful. They absorb and retain no salutary moisture from the rare torrential rains of autumn, which dash down their ravined sides, ruining and tearing the friable soil, with not a kindly root to stay and store them. This reforesting of mountains is a great question, nothing being more important to a climate than its supply of woods and the distribution of its rains; the future of agriculture depends on it, especially in Provence, where, even more than elsewhere, the struggle for water is the struggle for life. In 1860, and for some years after, much planting was done; but then, alas! there came a slackening of zeal. Farmers everywhere think of the present rather than the future, and a plantation remains unproductive for a score of years; whereas these barren mountains serve as winter quarters to endless herds of sheep, who browse their rocky perfumed sides. In the year 1902 more than three hundred thousand sheep were pastured on the territory of Arles. Flocks of three thousand and four thousand beasts are common. In summer, when the native sheep are sent to feed upon the high fields of the Alps, the shepherds of Algeria bring their flocks across the sea to Arles; the patient Africans find sufficient pasturage in the rare but succulent plants that defy the ardours of the summer sun among the pebbles of Camargue

and Crau, or on those rocky heights which, arid though they be, prove not unprofitable to the farmer who lets them out for hire. Talk to him of replanting! He fears to trouble a certain source of gain, and, knowing the span of life, prefers a small profit to-day to riches for to-morrow. But he sacrifices all the countryside. A forest has no enemy so deadly as the shepherd. It is he who burns the young wood, in order to have more grass; it is he who leads the sheep among the tender saplings, whose juicy shoots are dear to all the tribe of ovines, as the bird and the mouse to the cat, or the poultry-yard to the fox. The sheep must disappear if woods are to grow.

And unless the woods are planted, the climate of Provence will year by year turn harsher, dryer, more subject to the mistral. The delicate Alpilles will be worn by the force of torrents to a range of hillocks; the rivers will ruin the plains. From this, and more, the woods may deliver us. When men think of their children rather than of themselves—but when will that be?—the woods will be planted, and a generation will grow up to call these sheltered and sunny fields a Paradise. Even as it is, they are fertile and precocious in a rare degree. In the roomy inn-garden we wondered at the luxuriance of the spring, as we sat in the shadow of the blossoming guelder-rose bush, or picked great trails of rose and syringa. We gathered our first dish of strawberries on the 23rd of April. There are but two openings at St. Remy—miller or market-gardener: the two prettiest trades, suitable to this greenest, most pastoral of cities.

St. Remy is but gently raised above the plains; still low enough to nestle among the white-flowered hawthorn hedges by the runnels bordered with flowers. But, scarce two miles beyond, there rise the scarred, fantastic, sun-baked crags of

the Alpille range—the Alpines, in modern guide-book parlance—a furthest prolongation of the Alps. These are true southern hills, barren and elegant, grey, lilac, blue, pink even, or purple against the sky; but never green. Walk thither along the upward road till, at the mountain's feet, you come to a round knoll of fine turf, fringed with stone-pines, with, under every tree, a marble sarcophagus for a seat. Hence the view is beautiful across the wide blue valley to the snow-streaked pyramid of Mont Ventoux. But you will turn your back upon the view, for placed on the middle of this grassy mound is the pride of St. Remy: the Antiquities, sole relic of the prosperous town of Glanum Livii. Nowhere in Provence have we seen so beautiful a setting to monuments so perfect in their small proportions as the Triumphal Arch and the Mausoleum. Time has much ruined, it is true, the decorations of the Arch: the winged Victories are bruised and battered; only the feet of one warrior remain, the head and fighting arm of another; the chains of the slaves have fallen into pieces. But nothing has marred the style, the grace, the purity of the exquisite outline, Greek rather than Roman in its simple elegance. The Mausoleum is less correct in style, but more picturesque, more suggestive. A flight of steps leads to a sculptured pediment, from which there arises a crossed double arch, itself supporting a small round temple, roofed, but enclosed merely by a ring of columns, in the style of the Temple of Fortune at Rome. Within these columns stand two tall figures, robed in the ample toga of the Consul; they seem to lean forward as though they gazed across the valley to some ancient battle-field. Standing so high, and screened behind their wall of columns, the statues do not show the trace of the modern restorer. The opinion of archæologists is still, I believe, divided as to their identity, but the peasants have views of

their own on the matter. Some of them aver the figures to be the portraits of those twin emperors, Julius and Cæsar; but most of them, with some show of reason, consider that they commemorate the victories of Caius Marius, the hero of all this countryside. The figures are twain, so the peasants have doubled the General; Caius and Marius look out towards the Fosses Mariennes. Others, aware of the individuality of their hero, have solved the difficulty by giving him his wife as a companion! One shepherd, however, offered me the best explanations.

"Those two figures," said he, "represent the great Caius Marius and the Prophetess Martha, the sister of Lazarus, and the patroness of our Provence. They were, as you may say, a pair of friends."

"Dear me!" said I. "I thought there was a hundred years or so between them."

"Maybe," said the good man; "that well may be, madame; but, none the less, they remained an excellent pair of friends."

The facts of these good people were, as you see, a little incoherent. Yet, indistinct and fallacious though it be, their vision of a distant glorious past gives their spirit a horizon, their minds a culture, which I have never met in the provinces of the North, where ancient history begins with the French Revolution. Every ploughman, every shepherd, in the kingdom of Arles is aware that their country was to Rome, two thousand years ago, much what Nice and Cannes are to the Parisians of to-day. Their inheritance of so ancient a civilization, their contemplation of the vast and beautiful monuments of Latin triumph, have given them a certain dignity and sense of importance which may degenerate here and there into the noisy boastfulness of a Tartarin, but which far more frequently remain within the limits of an honest

proper pride. Those whom I met, the peasants and shepherds at St. Remy and Les Baux, had each a theory of his own concerning the great campaign of Marius, and pointed me out—at varying quarters of the horizon—the line of the retreat of the barbarians. If I sometimes was made to feel that, from the height of their ancient glories, they looked down on me as on one of that defeated horde, yet their attitude was always that of the kindest, the most courteous superiority. They are citizens of Arles or Avignon, as one was a citizen of Rome when the greatest honour was to boast *Civis Romanus sum.*

## VII

One day we drove across the plain to Tarascon, a cheerful little town beside a yellow river, overshadowed by a great yellow castle, the Château du Roi René, the painter-king. On the other bank of the river rises the Castle of Beaucaire, and the two old fortresses, whose enmity was once so cruel, glare at each other as harmlessly in our days as two china dogs across a village mantelpiece. Tarascon possesses a fine old church, whose porch would seem still finer were it not so near a neighbour of St. Trophime at Arles. We descended into the crypt to pay our reverence to the wonder-working tomb of St. Martha, sister of Lazarus, who, as every one (south of the Loire) is well aware, was cast ashore upon the coasts of Provence in company with the two holy Maries. She founded the city of Marseilles, and is buried under the church at Tarascon. As we picked our way underground we perceived in a dark recess of the staircase a second tomb, unvisited of pilgrims, but far more interesting to our eyes. A marble youth lies along the sarcophagus, dead. It is Jean

de Calabre, the son and heir of King René, an old friend of ours, for we have followed him in many a Neapolitan campaign. But after all he did not gain his crown of Naples, the brilliant young pretender. He lies here, forgotten, in the mouldy vault of St. Martha.

When we emerged to the outer air from this underground sanctuary of saint and hero, we remembered modern times, and asked our guide for the latest news of M. Tartarin. She protested her ignorance, but with a certain subdued irritation (or so we thought), as of one weary of a *scie* that has lost its edge. We were more fortunate, however, when we asked for the Tarasque. She ran with us along a narrow street in great impatience until we reached a large stable. The door swung open, and we beheld a sort of huge long-tailed cardboard whale, green, with scarlet scales stuck all over with yellow spikes, like the almonds in a plum pudding. The creature has a half-human head with goggle eyes, a vulgar good-natured smile, and a drooping black moustache, with a long horsehair mane depending from its neck. It suggests a cavalry "sous-off" who has in some way got mixed up with his charger.

The eponymic monster of Tarascon is no longer led along the streets in glory once a year, accompanied by men and maidens, in commemoration of the day when St. Martha tamed the dragon by a prayer, and led him along in fraternal peace, tied in a leash of her slender neck ribbon. The recent law against processions has stopped all that. 'Tis a pity, for the monster is a pleasant, vivid, childish-looking monster, no more terrible than a devil by Fra Angelico. He made us remember the horrible Tarasque which is to be seen in Avignon Museum. This noble monster was excavated under the foundations of an Early-Christian chapel in the Church of Mondragon. He is a panther-like person; his fore-claws

are dug deep into two half-scalped human heads. A portion of a human arm remains between his gruesome jaws. Flaxman himself never imagined a more hideous devil. "Progress is not an illusion, after all!" we sighed, as we looked at the amiable if vulgar Tarasque of Tarascon.

## VIII

When people come to stay at St. Remy, it is nearly always in order to make the excursion to Les Baux; a more desolate one cannot well be imagined, nor one that places in stronger relief the contrast between the sane and beautiful relics of antiquity and the misery, the squalor of mediæval ruins. Who was the misguided man who first made it fashionable to admire barren mountains and ruins, and other such dismal monstrosities? I should like to quarter him to all eternity in a palace at Les Baux.

The road thither quits the lovely flowery plain, to rise among arid limestone mountains. Flocks of sheep are grazing there, but there are more herbs than grass, and as the poor beasts climb ever in search of a more succulent blade, they send out beneath their feet the exquisite fragrance of mountain thyme and lavender and myrtle. On the steeper scaurs, the pale mountain roses of the cystus are all a-flower, and shed a spring-like beauty about the desolate scene.

It soon becomes more desolate. We wind higher and higher up the barren flanks of the Alpilles. The wind-eaten crags of white friable stone defy even the mountain herbs. It is melancholy cinder-grey lunar landscape.

This white stone is the sole harvest of these regions. As we advance we find the mountain scarred and hacked into countless quarries. Here and there, the great pale slabs

are piled into a tomb-like dwelling for the quarrymen. Far off, on the very crest of the mountain, we see, above all this desolation, an orchard of almond-trees, the only thing that betokens a human presence more happy than the slave-like labours of the quarry. Behind these trees there rises, as it seems, an uttermost wall of crags, yet more jagged, more desolate than the others. They are, as a matter of fact, the ruins of churches and palaces, the residue of the once princely city of Les Baux.

When at last we jog into the tiny *Place* of the city, we find a squalid village nestling in the centre of the former capital, like a rat in the heart of a dead princess. About three or four hundred poor creatures live here: God only knows what they find to live on! Slices of white stone, I suppose, and almond-shells.

They are, at any rate, eager for pence and human society. The carriage has not stopped before a guide pounces out upon us, and carries us up through a steep unspeakable wilderness of dead houses, deserted these three hundred years, and all falling most lamentably into dissolution. There is a poor Protestant temple, with its elegant delicate sixteenth-century carvings all in ruin. "Post tenebras Lux" is proudly carved above the dilapidated portals. All these ruins, varying over some two-and-twenty centuries, appear of the same age, the same dead-level of abjection. The "baums" of the cave-dweller, their cupboards and door-holes still perceptible, appear but little older than this or that mediæval palace. Ah, the place is terribly changed since I came here last with Jean Lefèvre, in 1382, to purchase for the Duke of Anjou the rights of the Seigneurs des Baux to the Empire of the East!

Under the crag-like tower of the castle there is a wind-swept mountain-top, whence you look down on the vast level

of Camargue and Crau. From these coast-like summits the sad-coloured salt-marsh appears infinite; it is treeless, melancholy beyond words. Were these spendthrift, sterile mountains planted with kindly woods; were yonder brown morasses drained and irrigated—(and indeed this latter labour is very fairly begun)—on what a different and happy scene might we look down, in barely a score of years! That blue streak on the horizon is the Mediterranean. There the three Maries landed, and began their inland march. Their three effigies, carved by their own hands, are still perceptible yonder, on a stone at the very foot of the mountain where we stand. Apparently they were wise enough not to seek the inhospitable summits of Les Baux.

There was one thing I should like to have seen in the dead city, but when we were there the relic had departed to a barber's shop at Aigues Mortes. Some time ago, the landlord of the tavern at Les Baux, digging in his garden, came on a slab which, being removed, exposed a mediæval princess, still young and, to all appearance, living. A moment after, she had crumbled into dust, all save her wonderful golden hair—yards of it, crisp, silky, and shining—which filled the stone coffin with its splendour. In this poetic treasure-trove the landlord saw an excellent opportunity. He changed the name of his inn, which forthwith became The Sign of the Golden Hair; and there, sure enough, on the parlour table, in a coffin of glass and plush, lay the thousand-year-old tresses of the dead princess. The curiosity attracted custom, and having made his fortune, the landlord sold his tavern of Les Baux and retired to shave the inhabitants of Aigues Mortes "at the sign of the Capello d'Or."

The villagers of Les Baux spend most of their time in delving for similar treasure. No one else has found a coffin

full of golden hair; but skeletons, coins of all periods, and armour, are every-day occurrences. I made a mistake in thinking that these people lived off freestone and almond-husks. They dine on Gaulish tibias, skulls of Roman soldiers, dead cats of the Stone Period, and a miscellaneous assortment of rusty iron. Not one of them but will sell you a human bone from a desecrated sepulchre as a souvenir of your visit to Les Baux.

## IX

Les Baux is on the way to Arles, and you cannot do better than push on to that delicious city. Among our impressions of Provence, Orange gave us an exquisite sense of ancient peace, of dignity not uncheerful in its seemly ruin; and St. Remy, with its flowery paths, its lilac mountain scaurs towering above the Roman arch and temple on the pine-fringed knoll, has left in our memory as it were a perfume of poetry and grace. But for a profound and melancholy beauty we saw no place like Arles. In that tiny city every step calls up a new picture, an unforgettable recollection. How many of them arise before me as I write! The lovely ruined theatre, so perfect even in its abandonment, two columns still supporting the fragment of an antique *fronton;* the great arena where the bulls still fight on Sundays before an eager audience of stalwart Provençal men and large-eyed women in the solemn dress of Arles; St. Trophime, with its wonderfully living portal crowded with saints and prophets, with enigmatic Tarasques and dragons, with strange cat-like wild animals creeping stealthily about the basement. There is a poem of Mistral's, called the *Communion des Saints*, telling the adventure of a little country

THE ALISCAMPS AT ARLES

girl who, arriving too late at Arles to hear the mass at St. Trophime, cried herself to sleep in the porch. When she awoke it was moonlight, and lo! in order to console her, the carved saints came down out of the portal and said the mass for her. They are so living, those saints, that the fable seems the most natural thing in the world.

And the cloisters within, how melancholy in their peace! And then, across the way, the Museum, with its unparalleled sarcophagi. The finest was discovered—I think in 1890—in digging the new railway across the Camargue. Never have I felt so strongly as in this Museum, as rich in Early Christian as in Classic monuments, the difference between the Pagan and the Christian conception of death. The Roman tombs are carved all over with beautiful and cheerful images, some scene of daily life, some vine-gathering or olive-harvest, perfectly human and natural, as though they would have placed between the sealed eyes of the dead an abiding memory of the pleasantest things on earth. The figures on the Christian coffins have lost their early grace; but these large-headed, large-handed, awkward saints and mourners have an intensity of expression, a pathetic conviction in the reality of a Beyond, which we have not seen before. The Roman mourners look back, the Christian look forward; the vision of the one is all regret and beauty, the other is exalted by an ardent and a yearning faith.

We have not yet done with the tombs of Arles. It was the first of May when we walked through the Alyscamps, and the latest hawthorn bushes were abloom about the Sacred Way. To tell the truth, we were disappointed with the Alyscamps. The railway has come too near to these Elysian fields, sadly narrowing their proportions. The most beautiful sarcophagi are all in the Museum or in St. Trophime. The tombs no longer chequer all the fields beyond, as when

Dante wandered among them and thought of Hell; no longer—

> "ad Arli ove 'l Rodano stagna . . .
> Fanno i sepolcri tutto 'l loco varo."

There is left but one long alley, borders with antique tombs, mostly lidless, obviously empty, shaded by a fringe of plane trees which leads to the ancient church of St. Honorat. This is a quaint, damp, melancholy place, with the raised quire built over the crypt, as at San Miniato. Its round, short pillars, five feet thick, wear an air of sturdy age. Itself appears a tomb. There is a charm in this mouldering old Romanesque church, with its illustrious perspective of the Alyscamps. Yet for a last impression of Arles we would fain go a little further up the hill, through the lovely Public Gardens to the Roman Theatre. Here we will sit on the marble steps awhile, and gaze on the unchangeable elegance of its proportions, serene in ruin, unabated of their dignity, and no less beautiful in their decay.

Adieu, beautiful city! *Gallula Roma* of the ancients! How different had been the fate of all our western world if Constantine had realised his dream, making of Arles the centre of the Roman Empire!

# HOW THE POOR LIVED IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

# HOW THE POOR LIVED IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

## I

DURING the Middle Ages the country was inhabited, much as it is to-day, by three distinct classes of persons—the nobles, the yeomanry, and peasants; classes distinct but capable of interfusion. Then as now many a noble, impoverished by warfare or mismanagement, sold the fattest acres of his lands to the wealthy merchant from the county town.* Then as now many a frugal shepherd laid by a penny here, a farthing there, till, with the trifling profits of his wage, he bought a plot of ground, a barn, a cabin; continuing meanwhile his earlier service; until his repeated and accumulated savings, enriched by the harvests of his rood of land, were sufficient to purchase a little farm.† Then as now

* See the *Comptes des Frères Bonis*, merchants at Montauban during the second half of the fourteenth century, published (1890) by M. Ed. Forestier. Bonis himself possessed in the vicinity of Montauban lands and houses to the value of sixty or seventy thousand pounds sterling, modern value;—which did not prevent his selling his goods with his own hands, down to the smallest detail.

† See *Bonis*, ccviii. Among Bonis' servants the swineherd, Jean Chaussenoire, bought a vineyard; the neatherd, Salona, two houses in town; another neatherd, a house on the banks of the Aveyron. In 1366, under the English, a shepherdess comes to Bonis and entrusts him with her savings: three and thirty pounds! Bonis's valet, a man at wages of five pounds a year, possessed enough land to take 430 litres (two septiers) of wheat at the sowing: from six to eight acres of land.

the son of many such a peasant farmer, migrating to the town, became a wealthy merchant,* a man who lived in greater luxury and spent with greater profusion than the nobles, and who, on account of the services he could render them, in an age conspicuous for its lack of ready money, mixed with them almost on equal terms. Finally, in those, as in these days, the King knighted † many and many an eminent citizen, endowed him with an escutcheon, and married his sons into the oldest families of France. Thus the burgher class was a sort of omnibus by which the serf jolted on through several generations, towards the peerage; only, the journey being long, and demanding not merely talent and perseverance, but rare qualities of endurance, it was undertaken with success only by exceptional persons.

These exceptional persons are beyond the narrow limits of this paper: some other time, perhaps, we may examine the interesting question of the transition from class to class at the end of the Middle Ages; but to-day our business is with the humbler rural folk, the yeoman farmer, the tenant on the estate, the day labourer. What were the wages they earned and the pence they saved? What was the food they ate and the raiment they wore? The schools they sent their children to, and the drugs they brewed for themselves or bought in time of sickness? In examining this, we examine the sum of continuous inglorious effort which, in a time of unexampled disaster, helped France to bear up against an untoward fate, and sent her down to future ages, prosperous and free.

The yeoman farmer, or vavassour, was the aristocrat of

* Léopold Delisle, *L'Agriculture Normande au Moyen Age.* See pp. 8–17, an account of the position of the *hospites*, who, often burghers in the town, were little better than serfs in the country.

† For example, the Marmosets of Charles V.; but this king also knighted numerous burghers of Paris.

his condition; his ancestors were freemen, and he himself, though less than noble, had certain of a noble's privileges: he was free to quit or sell his estates at will, free to marry whom he would; there were even vavassours who held their land by military service. But as a class they paid a rent to their lord, were constrained to till a portion of his lands, and to furnish him yearly with a draught-horse for his stable; differing in this from the noble, who held his lands by faith, by homage, and by military service, paid no rent, and owed no *corvée*. Nevertheless a wealthy vavassour was, as we should say, a country gentleman of the humbler sort: a "half-sir," as they say in Ireland. In time of peace he lived with a certain state and order; in time of war he carried a lance and rode to battle on horseback, with his men behind him. There were, of course, poor vavassours, who paid less rent and performed a more considerable *corvée*, and (for the limits of class were little less elastic then than now) if some among the yeoman-farmers rose almost to equality with the noble, there were also unthrifty and ruined vavassours * who were merely the equals of the saving cottager or the tenant on the estate.

The vavassour, or yeoman, with the colon or rich farmer, formed an upper class among the rural population. Immediately below them came the tenants-on-the-estate, men who were not wholly free, who might not, for instance, sell their lands or marry without the express permission of their feudal lord, and who, should their seigneur be taken in battle, might be taxed to the verge of ruin in order to raise his ransom. These men, in fact, were serfs; but there were degrees in servage. In the meaning that we attach to the word, servage was extinct by the end of the fourteenth

* For the full description of the origin and class of vavassours, we refer our reader to L. Delisle, *L'Agriculture Normande au Moyen Age*.

century. There was no acknowledged exercise of arbitrary power. The relations of the peasant to the lord of the manor were as well defined as those of the lord himself towards his feudal suzerain. In theory, the peasant might not sell his lands or marry without leave; but, in practice, this meant merely that he paid his landlord a slight tax on these occasions, even as we pay the death-dues to the State on coming into an inheritance. Certainly he was, in theory, "*taillable et corvéable à volonté;*" but these dues and *corvées* were almost invariable; they were attached rather to the land than to the lessee. A certain property carried with it a certain tax and *corvée*, let who would be the tenant. That is to say, that in an age when ready money was locked up in the hands of the merchants or in the excommunicated treasury of the Jews, rent was paid, not only in cash, but also in kind and in labour. For instance, a farmer renting an estate worth £20 a-year, would agree to pay £5 in cash, £10 in corn and poultry, and the remaining £5 in a certain number of days' labour spent in performing certain tasks, always rigorously determined beforehand. These were the *corvée*. It was left for later centuries to abuse a custom which, in its origin, was at least as convenient to the tenant as to the proprietor of the estate. The tenant on the estate—serf as he was, and object of our hereditary pity—occupied, in fact, a situation not unlike that which Mr. Chamberlain once wished to assure to every cottager in his kingdom. In Normandy the cottage and outhouses of the tenant covered a square of eighty feet, the paddock and garden adjoining measured two Norman acres —nearly six acres of to-day. These dimensions appear to have been invariable, but the amount of income derived from the farm varied naturally with the quality of the soil and the character of the tenant. A rich tenant-farmer was the equal

of an unthrifty yeoman. Nor was it uncommon for the same person to be a tenant-farmer in the country and a provision-merchant in the market-town, so that the tenants furnished many thriving and adventurous recruits to the burgher class. They were often men of means, living very simply, and amassing year by year the greater part of the profits of their farm. The names of many among them are registered as the donators of the abbeys and churches of their countryside. Below this solid, thriving, and generous class, whose serfdom in the fourteenth century was merely the matter of a traditionary tax or two, came the real children of the soil, the *peasants*, *villains*, or *rustics*, renters of a tiny holding, for which they paid with little money and much service; and, lower still, the *cottars*, or *labourers*, holders of a mere hut and patch of garden—men who seldom, if ever, handled coin, who paid for their bread with the sweat of their brow, and for whom the heaviest *corvées* were reserved.

I have never yet met in mediæval documents with anything resembling the refined and fantastic *corvées* of the eighteenth century: no mediæval peasants that I know of were stationed by the moat all night to beat the water with their flails and keep the frogs from croaking. The first and most essential *corvée* of the fourteenth century—which cottars, tenants, yeomen, were all alike compelled to perform in due degree—was the service of transport.

We can scarcely realize the difficulties of agriculture in an age when each countryside was constrained to live almost exclusively upon its own resources. The roads were so few, so bad, and so unsafe, that rarely any product, however unnecessary in its immediate district, and however urgently needed a hundred miles away, could be conveyed to the

best market. Thus, while more than half of Normandy was under forest, the monks on the marshes of the Norman Cotentin had to cook their meals and warm their chill refectories in winter-time by a brief blaze of straw and cow-dung. Corn, it is true, when thrashed and ground, was sent from place to place; but bulkier crops, such as fodder, hay, and wood, were rarely carried any distance. When the hay harvest was ended, the farmer would calculate how many head of cattle he could provide for through the winter months, and at Martinmas he killed for salting as many as exceeded his means of sustenance. There was, moreover, a certain amount of carrying indispensable on every great estate: such as the transport of manure and marl and lime, for dressing the soil; the carrying of the master's corn and wine to and from the winepress and the mill; and especially the carting from the forest of the wood necessary for fuel and repairs. For this first and typical *corvée*, the yeoman gave a draught-horse, the tenant lent his team and cart, the cottar furnished the strength of his thews and sinews. But this, like every other form of *corvée*, might always be transmuted into a sum of money. For the *corvée*, as we have said already, was merely one of the forms of rent. With the service of transport, the yeoman's duties usually ended. Yet he sometimes, and the tenant-farmer always, was responsible for the tilling of a certain specified number of his master's acres. The full *corvée*, exacted of rustics and cottars, comprised not only the service of carrying and ploughing, but the duties of cleaning out the manorial stables and outhouses, of digging for marl and lime, of gathering manure for the fields, of cutting thatch for the roof, besides thrashing the corn, making the hay, cleaning the moat, washing and shearing the sheep, and helping in the vintage. It must be remembered that, although men on

*corvée* received no pay, they were very amply fed throughout the term of their labours. We may therefore look upon the cottar—the man who gave no money, but so many days a week in all seasons to his master—as having signed a contract to work a certain portion of his landlord's estate in return for the usage of a smaller portion of that same estate. He received as payment for his service, and in addition to his plot of ground, a house to cover him, tools to work with, and his full keep for every day spent about his master's business. Despite all abuses, the Normandy of the fourteenth century was, after all, a place in which a humble honest man might earn his bread, lay by thriftily, watch the market, purchase wisely, and rise from class to class much as he may to-day.

## II

France in the Middle Ages, and even in the earlier half of the fourteenth century, was still a vast agglomeration of heterogeneous races, each with different customs and different traditions. Aquitaine was as English as Surrey was French; Brittany was still a separate and generally an inimical country; Burgundy, Provence, and even Périgord, were petty sovereignties independent of the crown of France. These different districts had each their different manner of letting land and providing for its tillage.

But, in almost all of them, French agriculture was already remarkable; far superior, for instance, to that of our own England, notwithstanding her temperate winters and rich soil. The land, ploughed four times a year in the south of France,* was ploughed only once in England,† and there is no record of any harrowing or rolling. The crops chiefly

* Bonis. † Thorold Rogers, i. 16.

grown in England were wheat, barley, oats, peas, beans, and vetches; hemp, so abundant a crop in France, was less frequently harvested. The English kitchen-garden was then, as now, singularly deficient. We, who to-day, as a rule, possess neither chicory, cardoon, scarole, and hardly any sorrel in our borders, who seldom stew or stuff a cucumber, who are unaware what excellent soup may be made from a cabbage with a little butter, or even from the water in which green peas have been boiled,—we were still poorer in our invention during the Middle Ages; though, at least, in those days our dinners were not saddened and soddened by the boiled potato. "Onions, nettles, mustard, leeks, and peas were the only esculent vegetables," according to Mr. Thorold Rogers. "We probably also possessed cabbage, but I have never found either seed or plants quoted." *

Meanwhile, across the Channel, brussels-sprouts (or *pommes-de-choux*), three other kinds of cabbage, winter-greens, spinach and sorrel, beetroot, carrots, parsnips, turnips, beans and peas, watercress, lettuce and even the larger kind known as Romaine (introduced into France from Avignon by Bureau de la Rivière), sweet basil, with every kind of herb, no less than cucumbers, garlic, leeks and onions, rhubarb and fennel, pumpkins, borage, raddish, were in daily and abundant cultivation. France in those days had even dishes of which she has lost the trick to-day, such as violet leaves, cooked like spinach or served as a salad, the green ears of wheat boiled with melted butter, and the young burgeons of the vine, dressed with a *sauce piquante;* additions to the table of which, for some reason, we have disused the habit.†

* *History of Prices, loc. cit.*, and p. 66.

† See especially the treatise on gardening in the *Menagier de Paris*. There is also a valuable chapter on the kitchen-garden in M. L. Delisle's *L'Agriculture Normande au Moyen Age*. Most of the plants quoted were already grown in the gardens of Charlemagne.

The fruit-garden in England was as behindhand as the kitchen-garden. "We read of no plums, except once of damsons." Fancy, choosing damsons! We had not yet invented our famous William pear, which we have sent over to France, and which to-day, in the gardens of Touraine, rivals the more ancient Bon Chrétien, already common there, and celebrated in the fourteenth century. But, across the Channel, the peaches of Anjou, the plums of Orleans, the figs of Poitiers, the French grapes and almonds, had nothing to fear from any competition. As far north as Caen and Dieppe, apples and pears of many sorts, grapes (grown for dessert on a trellis in a sheltered place), plums (purple and golden), cherries, gooseberries, green figs, almonds, and walnuts were commonly sold in the public market (the town's headsman had a right to a handful out of every basket), while peaches and raspberries, though rarer, ripened in private gardens. Apples were about equally abundant in France and in the kingdom of King Edward; and we may suppose that the wild fruits of the cherry and strawberry, domesticated in every French *potager*, could not have been quite utterly unknown in England.

If the English, then as now, were little acquainted with the charm and cheapness of a vegetable diet, then as now their meat was better and less expensive than in France; and English wool was quite unrivalled. The chief wealth of the Anglo-Saxon farmer grew on the curly backs of his flock. Wool from the fat meadows of England was exported in exchange for wine from the dry and sunny slopes of France. Another national industry had begun to develop: English hops and English beer were already widely known, and compensated the acidity of English wine. The vine, grown round many a monastery in the south of our island,

never received—and, owing to our watery sunshine, never could receive—any extensive culture. It is most unlikely, in an age when the wines of Gascony and English Bordeaux were continually introduced into the mother country, that English wine was at any time grown for drinking. It was probably cultivated for the service of the Mass, in small quantities round every abbey, as in Normandy. The accidents of warfare might intercept the vessels that brought the wines of Gascony to English shores; and thus, but for the humble vineyards of Kent and Middlesex, an unimportant incident of the Hundred Years' War might practically, at any moment, have placed the English people under ban of excommunication.

## III

We have seen that in Normandy, as in England, the farmer paid his landlord partly in money and partly in labour; but more in money and in labour than in kind. In the south of France the system was somewhat different; the tenant paid his proprietor chiefly in the produce of the land. Owing to the kindness of Madame Marcel Dieulafoy I have been able to look through several leases of farms near Toulouse at the present time; and I have been interested, and even surprised, to see how little the leases of the farms round Montauban, in 1350, published by M. Forestier in the Accounts of the Brothers Bonis, differ from the actual leases in use to-day for farms let *en métayage* in the south of France.

The mediæval farmer in Aquitaine and Gascony was simply a partner of the proprietor, for the exploitation of his lands and stock—a 'bouman,' as I believe they still say in Scotland. The one furnished the land, the cattle, and

even the implements, as well as the seed for the first sowing. The other supplied his time, his labour, the keep of cattle, and the repair of instruments. The increase was generally divided equally between the two partners, save in the case of wheat and wine, of which the landlord usually reserved himself a larger share. This is the system of *métayage* still in use in the south of France to-day. Here is a lease for the year 1351, drawn up between the merchant Bonis, of Montauban, and two of his "gasaillers," or farmers.

"Montauban. 2nd October, 1351.

"The Second October, 1351, we agreed for the lease with R. Picard and Rochelle, our Gasaillers. And we agreed that I shall sow or give the seed. We shall share the harvest in the field *au tiers et à la moitie* [a third for wheat and half for other grains], the largest half being mine. The meadows and other lands are to remain as before: *i.e.* Picard and Rochelle are to pay me an annual rent of two livres [let us say, £8 sterling]."

In another lease, for the year 1353, the farmer takes the arable land and cedes half its produce; but for the house, the garden, and as much meadow-land as a man would take two days to mow, he pays a yearly rental in money of forty sols, and a quit-rent of ten brace of capons. The same leases give us particulars as to the wages of farm-servants in the south of France. In 1358 a cowherd received nine livres a year and a pair of shoes. Now, historians are pretty generally agreed that the fourteenth-century livre represents about a hundred francs of our money. At this valuation, our Gascon neatherd received the equivalent of nine hundred francs in modern currency: that is to say, £36. A swineherd was paid four livres a year and his shoes; a shepherd, six livres a year (£24) and his shoes; an old woman-servant,

two livres a year (about £8), her shoes and a warm petticoat; for in those days, as in these, the servants on a Gascon farm were housed and fed at the expense of the farmer. Thus the rate of rustic wages was sensibly higher than it is to-day, when twenty pounds a year are considered excellent wages for a labourer on a farm. It is true that a modern shepherd or a head-cowboy has certain perquisites which raise his wage to very nearly the amount paid in the fourteenth century. But we cannot talk of progress.

There were several ways of hiring stock. On most farms the cattle were supplied by the landlord, the tenant being bound, at the expiry of his lease, to restore the flock and herds in the same condition as he found them. They were also let out on hire. Rochelle, the farmer of Bonis, hires from his landlord a pair of oxen worth twelve livres; for the use of them he pays every year a rent of three septiers of wheat (about 650 litres), but for every septier of wheat he is accounted to have acquired a right to one-twelfth part of the cattle, so that at the end of four years the team was to become the property of Rochelle. This system (not unlike the three years' hire system, by which many people of the modern middle class acquire their more expensive furniture) was very widely spread throughout the southern provinces.

The ploughs, carts, reaping-hooks, rakes, flails, scythes, spades, shovels, winepresses, benches, taps, and barrels, etc., necessary on every estate, were let with the land upon a repairing lease.

The Hundred Years' War, with its train of ruin and depopulation, introduced the disastrous fashion of mortgaging the cattle on a farm. The unhappy tenant, at his wits' end for ready money to pay the taxes and to defray the

expenses of his farm, sold his herds to some farmer a little less wretched than himself, with the proviso that, for a stipulated number of years, he was to keep on using the cattle with a right to half their produce. Thus one Colin Bois du Mesnil-Patri, near Caen, sells to Guillaume le Paumier, of St. Pierre, nine and twenty sheep, two red cows, two calves, a two-year-old steer, and a mare for the trifling sum of eight livres fifteen sols (say £35), reserving the use of them and half their produce during the three years next ensuing,* after which time the entire stock was to become the property of the buyer. In three years, therefore, such unwary farmers would find themselves deprived of the only manner in which they could work their land ; it was certain ruin unless, in the breathing-space assured them by the mortgage, some unusual harvest or happy turn of their affairs should enable them to lay aside a sum sufficient to stock the farm afresh.

Sheep in those days cost, as a rule, ten sols per head (say £2), alive and unshorn,† though when dead and skinned a sheep could be had for a tenth the price.‡ (At the present time in Gascony the normal price for a live sheep is two and thirty francs.) A fourteenth-century ox cost from two to six livres, a cow about three livres (£12). Pigs were dear, valued each between two and three livres, a price apparently in excess of modern values. The horse was less esteemed than the ox for agricultural purposes; he cost as much, or more, to buy, and a great deal more to keep; you could not eat him, he has no horns, and his skin was far less valuable as hide. Still, the horse was indispensable to travel. We give a list of the prices that he fetched in the Comté d'Eu between 1382 and 1388:—

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* Delisle, p. 221. † Delisle, p. 616.
‡ Thorold Rogers, i. 54.

| | Livres. | Sols. | Deniers. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 horse .. .. .. .. | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| 1 hackney .. .. .. .. | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| 1 tall grey horse .. .. .. | 1 | 10 | 0 |
| The horse called Rage-en-tête .. | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| The roan hackney .. .. .. | 2 | 10 | 0* |

And in Picardy, in 1389—

| | Livres. | Sols. | Deniers |
|---|---|---|---|
| A bay hackney .. .. .. | 1 | 10 | 0 |
| A black horse .. .. .. | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| A grey nag .. .. .. .. | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| A pair of greys .. .. .. | 10 | 0 | 0† |

The inventories published in the *Accounts of Bonis* show us that, on a small farm, at any rate, a pair of oxen, one horse, one ass, two pigs and a sow, a good deal of poultry, and a swarm of bees were usually kept. (In my chapter on Touraine, you will see that this is about the stock of a similar holding to-day.) We cannot estimate the price of these animals at less than twenty livres; so that few small landowners could hope to stock their farm out of their savings. Therefore, in districts where the hire-and-purchase system did not obtain, it was customary for the large farmer to let out his beasts to the poorer one; the oxen at a rate of from five to six sols per year, the sheep at about one sol per annum and per head; the milk and the young belonging to the tenant.

## IV

As a rule, then as now, the person who made the largest profit on his land was the very small landowner. Many circumstances combined to favour him in the end of the

* Delisle, p. 583.

† *Régistres du Châtelet*, i. p. 3; and ii. pp. 100, 351, 370, 460, and 461.

Middle Ages. The cost of labour was high; he with his family could run the farm without paid assistance. The raising of cattle is nearly always more profitable than the growing of crops, and the man with little land might yet possess considerable herds. A very slight tax, paid either in labour or in kind to the lord of the manor, secured him the right to pasture his cattle on the wide grassy borders of the lanes and in the interminable forests that still covered half of France; the sheep were driven to pasture in the salt-marshes, one in every flock being yielded, as a sort of tithe or rent, to the owner of the land; while in winter-time the right of pasture in stubble or aftermath was common to all the cattle of a commune. The tenant who owned all these flocks of swine and sheep, which fattened on the acorns and grasses of the manor, had probably round his humble cabin nothing more than a few acres of harvest-land for his own use. He possessed neither draught oxen nor horses for ploughing, but paid one of his wealthier neighbours to perform this service. Over and over again we find the records of similar transactions; the price given varying naturally according to the extent and quality of the fields to be furrowed.*

At harvest-time, then as now, the peasant farmer could engage a man by the day to help him in the stress of work; the labourer usually received his meals and about one sol per day,†—say five francs—which is much what he would receive at the present time.

We have now a fair idea of the expenses of farming. The profits then as now were mainly the sale of wool and

* Bonis, cxcvii.

† *Régistres du Châtelet:* varlet thatcher, one sol and his keep (i. 393). Joubert, *Vie privée en Anjou:* hedgers paid per day, one sol and their food (p. 98). Thorold Rogers: for mowing an acre, 8½*d.*; harvesters for carting corn, one sol two deniers, and their food (i. 255).

hides, of beasts, of corn, of wine or cider. The price of these articles, due proportion being guarded, has not varied in any surprising fashion. The average price of corn (which in the terrible years that followed Poitiers rose to thirty sols) was fifteen sols the septier, let us say thirty shillings the hectolitre; owing to the quantity of foreign corn imported, it does not fetch more than half as much to-day, but on the other hand, owing to our improvement in agriculture, an acre nowadays yields twice as large a harvest, so that the profit to the farmer is about the same. The commonest *vin ordinaire* appears to have been worth thirty-two deniers the septier—a little more than a halfpenny the litre; but the wine usually served in country taverns cost four deniers the pint* (about 1*s.* 3*d.* the bottle, shall we say)—which is more than a "Gladstone claret" commands in France to-day. (That used in our kitchen, the common household wine of France in 1903, costs, if bought by the barrel, a little more than fourpence a litre; but were it not for the extravagant tax paid to the State, it should cost no more than twopence, at most.) To return to our fourteenth century: In 1371 a butcher at Evreux values two small oxen at four livres five sols; while a large ox of Tallevaude, in 1383, is worth six livres—about four and twenty pounds—which is just five pounds less than the average price given by French country butchers for a fine full-grown beast to-day.

The houses of the farmers and the country people differed (then as now) according to their rank and prosperity, and also according to the district they inhabited. The yeoman farmer, and even the well-to-do husbandman, dwelt in a solid house of brick or stone, tiled or slated, with a paved yard separating it from the barns, the outhouses, the dairy,

* *Régistres du Châtelet*, i. 427, 448, 558, *et passim*; and ii. 497.

and cattle-pens. The farm-house—which, in England, was always constructed with a southern aspect—as invariably faced the east in Aquitaine, while to the rear, well open to the west, was a long tiled verandah, where, in winter afternoons, the hemp-picking, the wool-carding, the threshing, &c., was done.* Within, the vast kitchen glowed in the light of the fire—almost as unextinguishable as the vestal virgin's; peat, coal, and wood were each abundantly employed; and for a trifling rent, generally paid in kind or labour, the lord of the manor would permit the farmers on his land to cut their turfs from his bog, or their boughs from his forest. Fuel was not only actually, but relatively cheaper in the Middle Ages than to-day; for the bogs were not drained in those days, the forests covered great expanses, and the cost of carriage made it almost impossible to transport their produce. In nearly every part of France and England the supply of fuel was in excess of the demand.

This hospitable fire flared up a chimney proportioned to its size, lighting the huge brick oven, the iron fire-dogs, the bellows, shovel, gridiron, ladles, cauldrons, saucepans, mortar, tin pails, and other utensils that stood on the brackets of the hearth; and irradiating the brass and copper pots, the metal candlesticks, the lamp, the lantern, the not unfrequent silver beaker, and the glass drinking-cups, that were ranged on the chests and cupboards round the walls.† Near this fire stood a high-backed settle, the master's ingle corner; and under the great mantel of the chimney narrower benches were set in the brick. Within easy reach of the hearth, a deep oak chest held the logs for burning. It was generally matched by a handsome wedding-chest with carved or

* Bonis, p. cxciii.

† See the farm inventory in Joubert's *Vie Privée en Anjou au XVme. siècle.*

painted front, long enough to contain a grown person full-length (as the readers of *Ginevra* will mournfully remember), but more usually filled, it must be admitted, with the best clothes, the trinkets, and the savings of the household. The *Registers of the Châtelet* record no crime so common as the breaking open of such wedding-chests; and it is surprising how many clasps or jewels, girdles of pearls, golden head-dresses and rings, and purses full of gold, were stolen from quite humble households. Our forefathers lived in times when the letting out of money at interest was insecure and considered a deadly sin, so they invested their capital in cups or trinkets of precious metal, pretty to look at, easy to hide, and readily converted into cash when necessity demanded a sacrifice.

The windows of this great kitchen were almost always small and rarely glazed: conceive it as a great stone cavern lit up by an undying fire that played on glittering surfaces. The light came chiefly from the hearth, or from the home-made rushlights of the north, the flaring pine-torches of the south, which lit the spinning wives and maidens, when at close of day they clustered round the fire. In the daytime the kitchen was a dusky place, as indeed it is still in most French country places, where its aspect has singularly little altered. Sometimes the only aperture, besides the door and chimney, was such a small square window as may be seen to-day in the cottages of Savoy, pasted over with a piece of oiled linen, impervious to the air. Often a heavy shutter, made of one slab of polished oak, protected a small uncovered lattice, shutting with a spring. These houses, so hygienically built to face the rising or the mid-day sun, could receive scarce a ray of its purifying light. Doubtless the vast chimney and the day-long fire sufficed to ventilate their dark recesses.

In one of the deepest of these recesses, well out of the

way, was placed the bed—a bed such as we can barely imagine, a family four-poster! Here reposed the father and the mother, several of the children, and—(readers of the *Heptameron* will remember this striking custom, which continued into the sixteenth century)—and the stranger within their gates.* A share of this ample couch was considered a special honour offered to a guest of note. The bed, if little private, was generally comfortable. The invoice of a day-labourer's widow, taken at Montauban in 1345,† proves her to possess two feather-beds, with pillows, fifteen linen sheets, four striped yellow counterpanes. In much poorer households the bed was sometimes stuffed with straw,‡ but nearly every mention we have of the bedding of the time proves it to have been no less ample, comfortable (nor, indeed, less cleanly) than in country places at the present day. In this respect the French were, and are to-day, far before the English, whom Mr. Thorold Rogers shows us sleeping on a rude and sheetless bed, covered by night with the garments in daily wear.§

Such was the house-place of the well-to-do: one room, but well furnished and spacious. Yet in 1417, Petit Pas and Isabel his wife, labourers of Vaux (Oise), have two rooms in their "ostel" (our Cantal *ostiau*), a "foyer" and a "chambre" (a but and a ben, as we might say), separated by an earthen wall. The rich yeoman was more amply lodged; and the manor-house contained, as a rule, three rooms: the hall, the dormitory, and the parlour.‖ But the

* Joubert.

† *Comptes des Frères Bonis, Marchands de Montauban*, publié par M. Édouard M. Forestier, 1890, p. ccx.

‡ *Châtelet*, ii. 509: "They took the bed, pulled the straw out of it, threw it in the chimney, and set fire to it."

§ Thorold Rogers, *History*, i. 13.

‖ See Vaissière, *Gentilshommes Campagnards de l'Ancienne France;* see also Thorold Rogers, *History of Prices*, i. 13. See *ibid.*, inventory of John Senekworth's

cottars dwelt in far humbler habitations. The small thatched cabins of Normandy were replaced in the centre of France by mere huts, generally built of plastered wattle, but sometimes no more than a rude lattice, of which the interstices were bunged with straw or hay; such a refuge as Nicolette built for herself in the forest, weaving it of boughs in their green leaves; such as to-day the summering shepherds construct, in an hour or two, on any down. Three such huts—one for the peasant, one for his cattle, one for his crops—stood round a paven yard.* The door of the hut in which the cottar lived with his family was divided laterally at about six feet from the ground, so that, while the lower part was closed, the upper door or shutter might remain open to admit the air and let out the smoke. For in these cabins there was frequently no other window. There was often no chimney, save a hole in the roof. The food was cooked over a brazier of charcoal, a *scaldino*, such as the poor people use to-day in Italy; but owing to the rising of the fumes, save in very windy weather, there was little smoke.

The people who lived so simply had better tools and more numerous implements than we suppose. Most countrymen possessed a ladder, a hand-mill, an axe, a crowbar, nails, a gimlet, hedge-clippers, a branding iron, a wheelbarrow, and often a light cart, a plough, harness, reaping-hooks, scythes, a hoe, spade, rake, flail, sieve, bushel, knife, hammer, a long ferruled staff, a bow; many owned a lance, and some a sword and buckler.† The Gascon labourer's widow already mentioned possessed a corn-mill, a tin washtub, a metal warming-pan, two brass water-jugs, two pint pots, a metal

effects, for the furniture of a Cambridgeshire manor in 1314. We notice six sheets, a mattress, a coverlet, a counterpane, a "banker" or stuffed cushion for a bench, three cushions, three table-cloths and two napkins, two drinking glasses, four silver spoons, basin and ewer, two silver seals, and *three books of romance!*

* Douet d'Arcq, ii. 139. 6. † Joubert, *La Vie Privée en Anjou.*

bowl, two metal pots, four bottles, a cauldron, a pestle and mortar, a salt-box, a pail, two iron tripods, a copper box, two large chests, a cupboard, a box, four trestle-tables, a bench, a carpenter's bench and tools, two baking-tubs, one kneading-trough, two corn-chests, and a large table, besides two axes, four lances, a crossbow, a scythe, and other arms and tools. We doubt if she would be better off to-day. The inventory of a farmer's stock of the same date and place (Montauban, 1345) contains four kneading-troughs, a large funnel, one winepress with screws, four tuns, eight casks, three barrels, and two kegs; a lead alembic for distilling, a cauldron, two metal water-jugs, cooking utensils; two wool-cards, three carding-combs for hemp, two spades, two flails, three reaping-hooks, one scythe, one crossbar, two carpenters' benches and tools, one shovel, two iron goads; a cart and harness; two oxen, one horse, one ass, two pigs, two sows, and a swarm of bees. Probably many a squatter's ranch is little better stocked.

## V

The food of country people in the fourteenth century was little different to that they use to-day, save that potatoes and buckwheat (so frequent in French rural diet) were then conspicuous by their absence. Then, as now, their meat was chiefly pork, in all its forms of bacon, ham, brawn, or blood-pudding; and pork was relatively little cheaper than it is in many a remote and rural place to-day. Butter, cheese, eggs were very plentiful; herrings were an article of almost daily diet (they cost a sol the hundred, about a halfpenny apiece), and in the north of France people consumed freely a kind of salted whale called *craspois*, a

truly Viking dish, of which the popularity has wholly vanished.* In Normandy pea-soup was then, as now, a favourite food.* Wine, beer, and mead were drunk by all classes. In 1392, a homeless pin-maker on the tramp breakfasts off wine and fish ; † workmen out of employment dine at the village inn off bread, meat, and red wine at fourpence the pint.‡ In the same year the provisions left in the house of the wife of the Duke of Bourbon's minstrel were : bacon to the value of four sous or shillings, six large loaves of bread, a great pot full of green peas, two penn'orth of onions, and a shilling'sworth of salt.§ But the best criterion we get of the daily food of the rural population is the record preserved in the accounts of manors and monasteries of the dinners afforded to labourers on *corvée*, or, doled out day by day in return for some bounden service. Thus, the smith of the monastery of Jumièges received in return for his occasional services a daily ration of two small loaves, a measure of wine of medium quality, and either six eggs, four herrings, or some equivalent dish.‖ A vintager of St. Ouen, on *corvée*, was supplied every day with two rolls and a mess of peas and bacon with salt.¶ A tenant of the monks of Bayeux, during his *corvée*, was entitled to a daily meal of a white loaf, a brown loaf, five eggs, or three herrings, with a gallon of beer.** The monks of Montebourg gave each of their men a loaf, a mess of pea-soup, three eggs, and the quarter of a cheese, or, if they chose, six eggs, and no cheese ; on fast days they made shift with three herrings and some nuts : they washed down this ample meal with as

* Léopold Delisle, *L'Agriculture Normande*, p. 189.
† *Régistres du Châtelet* for 1392, i. 174.
‡ *Ibid.*, 427. § *Ibid.*, 526.
‖ Delisle, *L'Agriculture Normande*, 189.
¶ *L'Agriculture Normande.*
** *Ibid.*, 190.

much beer as they chose to drink.* A tenant of the monks of St. Ouen received, in return for his *corvée*, not only bread and wine, pea-soup and bacon, but fresh or salt beef and poultry. All this is in Normandy. In Anjou, the men on *corvée* dine more sparely off wine and bread and garlic; but the carpenters on a farm receive in addition to a daily wage of one sol eight deniers, five penn'orth of meat per person; the hedgers and ditchers also dine off bread and meat.† In almost every one of the numerous records that we have of the daily fare of the labouring class in fourteenth-century France, we find a dish of eggs, a mess of peas and bacon, half a chicken, a few herrings, or a generous slice of meat, added to the modern labourer's too scanty nuncheon of bread and cheese and beer.

Our rural ancestors of every class went well and warmly clad. The farm labourers of the fourteenth century wore better garments than our ploughmen use to-day. Men of every class appear to have possessed linen shirts and linen drawers, hose of strong cloth, and leather shoes; a coat of warm russet or fustian, an ample cloak resembling the *Limousin* of Auvergne, or Tuscan *Ferraiuolo*, and (sometimes attached to this garment, sometimes separate) a long-tailed hood of cloth. Masons, labourers, workmen of every class, completed this costume by a pair of gloves: London gloves were held in high esteem. Bonis, the merchant of Montauban, sold them to his country clients at seven sols the dozen.

The women were as sensible in their attire. They all wore a long chemise of linen, and over this a garment called a doublet, in form resembling the linen bodice sewn

* *L'Agriculture Normande*, 190.

† Joubert, *Vie Privée en Anjou*, p. 94.

to a white petticoat, which is still used in dressing little girls. The wedding doublet of the butcher's daughter of Montauban took about five yards of fine white linen of Paris, costing fifteen sols the ell—a measure which exceeded the modern metre by about two nails. The butcher was evidently a man of means; for we find his wife ordering some doublets for herself at £3 10*s.* apiece, while a neighbouring noble's wife spends not quite half as much on those selected for her wardrobe. The wife of another burgher chooses three and twenty doublets, delicate in quality and of a vermeil colour. Over this garment the women of the fourteenth century put a tight long bodice of strong cloth, to which they attached, by hooks or lacets, a pair of tight long sleeves, generally of some costly material, silk being used on great occasions even by the poorer classes. Over this, again, they slipped a very long dress, touching the ground on all sides, tight in the bodice, but sleeveless, or with loose hanging sleeves; it was generally much trimmed with silk and braid. A farm-servant buys a piece of red silk to trim her gonella, another chooses one of blue cloth worth one livre: the simplest that we find, which is made of a coarse pale cloth called blanket, comes, with the trimmings, to nearly fourteen sols. The gown was surmounted by a heavy girdle, richly ornamented, from which the purse and keys of the house-wife dangled. Out-of-doors a long draped mantle, trimmed to match the gonella, was usually worn.

The women of the later fourteenth century were fastidious in dressing their hair. We all know the *hennin*, the tall slender sugar-loaf of buckram, from which floated a gauzy veil. The peasants naturally did not wear this inconvenient and romantic head-dress. They braided their hair with ribbons and galoons intertwined in every plait. A woman with long hair would use about seven yards of ribbon; over

this she placed a strong net of silk or thread; the whole was enveloped in a veil or mantilla of thin silk, the favourite ornament of country-women, and frequently given as a wedding-present. A very handsome veil of German silk would cost as much as seventeen sols; a commoner one, of good Aleppo silk, from five to ten sols; still a mantilla quite presentable in appearance, of a rougher silk, could be had as low as three sols (we may suppose about twelve shillings of our money). Almost every peasant in well-to-do circumstances afforded his wife and daughter this piece of elegance, probably only worn on great occasions. The artisans, small farmers, and farm servants of the fourteenth century were less economical in ornament than their descendants. The butcher of the little country town of Montauban gives his daughter, for her wedding day, a silver necklace, a purse, a girdle of silk, a string of amber beads, a pair of embroidered gloves, a veil or mantilla of German silk, two silk nets for her hair, and many-coloured silks and threads for the embroidery of her wedding-gown. An artisan affords his child a veil of German silk, a net to match, a string of amber, a purse and girdle, the whole expense coming to £1 6*s.*, or about five guineas of our currency. A servant on one of Bonis' farms buys for his wife a silk wimple; gloves, hair-ribbons, and ornamented hair-nets are common fairings.

We see all these good people, arrayed soberly or splendidly according to their rank, but almost always comfortably dressed, as we turn the pages of the *Accounts of Bonis* or the palpitating *Registers of the Châtelet* (the Newgate Calendar of an earlier age). Along the country roads the notary jogs on business, dressed in violet cloth richly furred, solidly seated on his ample cob. He passes the country squire (the grandchild of the last rich semi-noble

vavassour) hooded in black parti-coloured russet, and wrapped in a houppelande of English green, furred with squirrel, the long end of his cloak thrown over the left shoulder. The shepherd on the hill drives his flock; he is warmly clad in strong brown woollen. The thatcher, as he steps across the fields from his daughter's churching, is dressed all in his best in a large check of brown and white and blue. There stands the farmer, all in sombre russet, with an elegant hood striped black and yellow; there are gold rings on his hand, worn over his gloves; there are gold clasps to his girdle. At the little village inn, the serving-maid comes out, dressed in iron-grey, with a bunch of pink roses in her hands. The mason of the hamlet stands at his gate, chatting with a fellow of his craft, and with a tramp in search of work; the home-staying workman is well clad in whitish-grey, with darker grey hose and grey-blue hood; the traveller has a long brown *cottehardie*, lined with an old coat, a brown hood buckled under the chin, brown hose, and strong leather shoes with steel buckles. At the corner of the road a wandering beggar waits for alms, dressed in a mantle of faded russet patched with an older light-blue garment, and a hood of Heaven knows what colour, not worth two deniers. His wife squats beside him, slovenly dressed in an old patched cassock tied round her waist with a reed. She has no hair, and a strip of dirty cloth tied round her head but half conceals her baldness. They are the only really shabby people that we meet (save the wandering friars, who make a virtue of it); but few are so magnificent as the drover, a person of importance, it would appear, from the quality and the quantity of his purchases. The goat-herd and the shepherd are all in russet; but see the drover as he comes home from market resplendent in his mantle checked with black and green: he sports a hood striped with grey and

yellow; hood and cloak are in accordance with the most fashionable standard of the day. Here out in the fields we seldom use such brilliant colours: russet, blanket, grey, blue, and English green are our usual wear. It is only when the knight, the doctor, or the merchant from the town is drawn this way that we see the real taste of the *bon ton:* the parti-coloured green and vermeil, white and blue, *vert perdu* and slate colour, yellow and black, white and vermeil, that are, with the universal black and green, the last cry of the *mode.* Both check and stripe are popular alike in town and country.

## VI

If not in every village, at least in every *châtellerie,* there was a doctor, a surgeon or a barber surgeon;* the labourers appear to have used their services freely and to have rewarded them with liberality. One of Bonis' day-labourers falling ill, sends to Montauban for the physician of the place, and pays him for several visits the sum of 4 sols 2 deniers—which we may compare to nearly £1 15*s.* of our money. Another pays his doctor as much as 18 sols, say £3 12*s.* And in the *Accounts of Bonis* we find frequent mentions of drugs and medicinal spices of an expensive sort, sold to the agricultural labourers of the district.

The doctors of the Middle Ages and later, even so late as the middle of the fifteenth century, were chiefly inspired by the theories of the Arabs. Louis XI., as we know, ordered the Paris University to copy *in extenso* the great work of Aboo Bekr ibn Zacaria er Razi, the famous physician of the tenth century, whose masterpiece, *El Mansoori,* is a

* Joubert, *Vie Privée en Anjou,* p. 60.

compendium of Arabian therapeutics. This book, commonly known as "Razi," was very popular throughout the fourteenth century. A copy of it, bought by Bonis for four livres, assisted him in the preparation of his drugs, and of the plasters, unguents, electuaries and tisanes especially in request among a fourteenth-century rural population.

It may be interesting to examine a few of the remedies employed. Rheumatism, that special misery of those that work in the wintry fields, was treated externally by the application of a plaster of cordials and aromatic gums spread on a thin piece of silk. The part affected was also rubbed with an ointment (costing seven sols) made of four ounces of turpentine and two ounces of white wax, one ounce of resin, one ounce of myrrh, two ounces of *bol d'Arménie*, and two ounces of oil of roses;* it was then covered with a sheet of wadding. Complaints of the skin were treated by an unguent composed of a quarter of a pound of marsh-mallow, a quarter of a pound of white wax, a quarter of a pound of olive oil, an ounce of incense, and an ounce of turpentine; medicated baths were also recommended. Sulphur was freely used. Aniseed was given as a specific against indigestion, with camomile, *Quassia amara*, camphor, and essence of cinnamon. Coughs and colds were cured by a sudorific tea of rose and camomile; by a milk of almonds mixed with starch and sugar, almost exactly resembling the delicious *looch* of modern France: by an infusion of pectoral flowers (mallow, violet, &c.), as well as by lozenges of gum arabic and barley sugar.† In severe cases the physicians of the Middle Ages administered the famous theriac of Nero, the *Theriacus Andromachi*, composed of opium powdered with some tannic bitter substance,

* Bonis, cxxi.

† All these remedies are taken from the *Accounts of Bonis*, *loc. cit.*, *et seq.*

together with sulphate of iron, and some two and forty active aromatic essences, such as turpentine, Cingalese cinnamon, valerian, citron, rose, etc.* A labourer at Bloxham, in Oxfordshire, was treated for bronchitis in 1387, with a syrup of oxymel and squills.† Disorders of the intestines were pretty generally combated by starch water, alum, and the astringent *bol d'Arménie.* Senna tea was also an ingredient in the humblest medicine chest. Besides the remedies we have mentioned, cordials of cinnamon, camphor, resin, and oil of pinks, electuaries of liquorice, dried prunes, and honey of roses were constantly employed. Oxide of zinc mixed with camphor ‡ was also given, but I do not know in what especial case. The hot bath and the vapour bath were highly esteemed, though less frequent, perhaps, than in the earlier Middle Ages, when hot baths were hourly cried through all the streets of Paris. Still, in the fourteenth century there was no town in any way considerable without at least one *établissement de bains.* We find in the *Registers of the Châtelet* that a hot bath was a somewhat expensive luxury, costing several sols. The prolonged warm baths in honour at the Court of Charles VI. were a scandal to the Church, and are denounced in a famous sermon of Jacques le Grand.

Besides the remedies we have quoted, it must be allowed that others more fantastic were occasionally used. Last week, at Aris, a little boy informed me that I need never suffer from migraine, for I could tie a live pigeon on my head, and let it depose its excrement on my hair : a certain remedy. He assured me also that his sister, whom the doctor from Vic had declared to be dying from congestion

* Henri de Parville, "Revue des Sciences," in the *Journal des Débats,* 23rd January, 1890.

† Thorold Rogers, i. 399. ‡ Bonis.

of the lungs, had been saved by the presence of mind of his mother: she slit up a live cat, placed half the palpitating creature on the back, half on the breast of the patient, who immediately recovered. Doubtless these medicines were known in the fourteenth century. An equally absurd but more elaborate sort were used especially at court and in the treatment of great personages. But our agricultural labourers, who thought twice before they changed their silver sou, though they may have split up a cat, were not accessible to fashionable quackery. In all the *Accounts of Bonis*, we find only two receipts that are patently unreasonable; and these are the most expensive. One of them is a powder of ground seed-pearls, the other an ointment of honey of roses, olive oil, white wax, pounded with "half an ounce of mummy." But the cold creams and cosmetics of the present day are not always conspicuous for science; we might find nostrums as inefficacious on the shelves of Madame Georgine Champbaron. And, indeed, it may be doubted whether the most fantastic remedies of the Middle Ages were not sometimes as successful against the nervous maladies in which they were most often used, as the Lourdes water, the hypnotising-mirrors, and the various patent medicines so capriciously infallible in our century. The poor and needy, with their humble, painful, everyday disorders, knew, then as now, the virtues of friction and wadding against lumbago; the peppermint tea that calms the colic; the plaster of boiled poppy-heads applied against the raging tooth. The old man, struggling with his asthma, had almost as good an opiate; the feverish child, tossing under its doubled blanket, a potion almost as sudorific, as we should find in any country place to-day.

Apart from their special virtues, the medicines of the Middle Ages had a very high hygienic value. They were

unusually powerful prophylactics. In an article on the "Workmen of Paris," published some years ago in the *Fortnightly Review*, I quoted from the Annales of the Institut-Pasteur a series of experiments made by MM. Cadiac and Meunier establishing the microbicide effect of Cingalese cinnamon; while the oil of pinks, the essences of valerian, thyme, citron, rose, etc., employed in almost every mediæval recipe, are each and all more hostile to the microbe than the iodoform treatment employed against typhoid fever in the Paris hospitals to-day. I advance this assertion with all due discretion, since I have never made any single experiment, and am not in a position to control the opinion of experts; but since the vanguard of science admits so high a value in the drugs employed by our benighted ancestors, we may allow that the pleasantries in vogue on the subject are possibly overstated or misplaced.

## VII

If the fourteenth-century village was less ill off than we are apt to imagine it in regard to the medicines of the body, it appears that the training of the mind was less absolutely non-existent in the rural class than it has been our habit to assert. Many of the labourers on the farms of Bonis could sign their names, though probably their science in writing ended there. But every tenant-farmer, in an age when the accounts of tenant and landlord were peculiarly complicated, was obliged to know a certain amount of book-keeping: doubtless the steward was often more learned than his lord. Hedge-schools were common;* in every considerable village,

* Joubert, p. 60. But see especially for this subject the masterly passage of M. Léopold Delisle, *L'Agriculture Normande au Moyen Age*, p. 175, *et seq.*

if not in every hamlet, there was a schoolmaster, appointed generally by the patron of the village living. There was a certain regulated number of parish schools in every county, and this number might not be exceeded: our ancestors never could be brought to recognize the advantages of competition. Certain texts, however, prove the existence of unauthorized hedge-schools, promptly quashed as soon as they came to the knowledge of the authorities.

The Great Plague, which so changed the face of Europe, diminished education by carrying off the schoolmasters. The Continuator of Guillaume de Nangis remarks that, after the epidemic of 1348, there were not enough teachers for the requirements of the houses, hamlets, and castles of his country. Thus the sons of the men who fought at Crecy grew up, though richer, more ignorant than their fathers.

The schools of the fourteenth century were not entirely free; and as a certain proportion of their profits went to the patron, he filled up the gaps as soon as possible. The village priest was often the schoolmaster, and the instruction was always chiefly religious; but the boys were also taught the rudiments of Latin grammar. The ideal of every peasant was to have a son in the Church—a son who might become abbot, bishop, chancellor, cardinal. It was their one great chance of rising in the world. But in the kingdom of the Mind, many are called, few chosen. Of the dozen or so boys who went to every village school (each with a dim idea that perhaps by-and-by he might become a parish priest, or enter some religious order) a fair proportion grew up as stewards or labourers.* Some, no doubt, persevered in their original intention; some went to the town, or, tiring of grammar, 'listed for a soldier; but, alas! we meet with a good many of

* It will be remembered that in the Third Order of St. Francis special provision is made for laymen who can read, evidently a considerable class.

them in the *Registers of the Châtelet*. Perhaps—who knows?—these ne'er-do-wells were the most useful of them all, for their depositions in the Court of Justice throw many curious lights on mediæval education. Thus, for example, one Jehannin de la Montaigne, a wandering mason accused of horse-stealing, invokes the privilege of clergy, asserting that he was tonsured at the age of eight years old when he went to school and learned his psalter—"car auparavant qu'il aprenist son dit métier de maçon, il avait esté avec plusieurs enfans d'icelle ville de Château Regnault à l'escole de la dite ville et avoit aprins jusqu'à son *Donnet* et *Catonnet;* et lors il savait bien lire."* This *Donnet* or *Donat* was the grammatical treatise of the learned Ælius Donatus, that glory of the fourth century, whose vigilant elucubrations were very popular throughout a thousand years. *Catonnet*, a school-book equally universal, was one century older: it was a paraphrase of the distiches of Dionysius Cato, once a famous philologist. These were both great doctors. To-day, as you see, we scarcely know their names.

The names of these two guides to knowledge were known to Jehannin de la Montaigne, but his science went no further. After a judicious course of torture, he was taken to the kitchen (as was the custom of that guileful age), placed in a comfortable chair before a cosy fire, with a warm mantle round his shoulders and a glass of wine in his hand. Many criminals, obstinate to screw and pulley, succumbed to these more deceiving influences, especially as they succeeded the chill and dismal hour of execution (the torture of the fourteenth century was far less diabolic than that of ages more refined, but it was uncomfortable and rheumatic—pails of icy water being dashed from time to time upon the dislocated patient). Well, to return to Jehannin, whom we choose as

* *Registres du Châtelet*, ii. 103.

an example from a crowd of fellow-sinners—he confessed, as he sat by the kitchen fire, that he was no more a priest than the cook. "But," added he, "a tonsure is convenient in judicial circumstances. Many of my companion masons had tonsures, and it was they who advised me to get one also, which they said I could do without prejudice, as I have really been to school and could read and write well enough when I left it. Therefore I went to the village and had myself tonsured *par un barbier, et non aultrement.*" That confession was the end of friend Jehannin; having no longer any claim to the jurisdiction of the Church, he swung forthwith from the neighbouring gallows. "Il n'avoit aucuns biens."

The courts of the Châtelet were literally encumbered with these sham clerks, who impeded the course of justice by asserting a non-existent benefit of clergy. Not one of them when confronted in the courts of justice with a psalter and a primer could read, write, spell a Pater, or say by heart a Latin prayer. This, however, proves nothing against the system of education, which was probably excellent. The School Board manager of the present day, in an age of unexampled science, knows how easily a boy may pass through half a dozen years of reading, writing, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, botany, physics, chemistry, Biblical exegesis, and all the other necessaries that no modern ploughboy is complete without; and he emerges no less ignorant than he went in. Yet the boys nowadays stay at school till twelve, or sometimes till fourteen; in those days they left at eight or ten. It is probable that *Donnet* and *Catonnet* did not penetrate far into the average inner consciousness. But all were not as ignorant as the good-for-nothings who came before the courts of law for purse-slitting and horse-lifting; these we may probably take as a natural selection of the unfittest.

M. Delisle, in his *Agriculture Normande au Moyen Age*, gives some delicious examples of the demi-Latinity of the learned peasant, which unfortunately I have not got by heart.

## VIII

The population of the rural districts of fourteenth-century France varied terribly according to the progress of the Hundred Years' War. It is difficult to frame a clear idea of then and now. But from the size of the churches remaining from the thirteenth century, which are almost always in accordance with the actual population, we may suppose that the inhabitants have not increased by more than half: we must allow about that proportion, since mediæval churches, built for sanctuary, were obliged to be large enough to shelter not only all the villagers, but also their valuables, in war time. The villages which have come down to us are not immensely larger, but numerous new communes have arisen on land that was covered then by bog or forest.

On the other hand, many villages called into life by the plenty and peace that followed the last Crusade of Saint Louis disappeared utterly in the long disaster of the Hundred Years' War. The King's tax-gatherers jolted through the country collecting the hearth-tax; again and again they found, beside the ruined steeple, a few tumbling beams, an empty stock-yard still paven; nothing more. Another village had vanished. The ordonnances of the Kings of France during the first twenty years of Charles V. are painfully eloquent of this continuous depopulation of the country. The wars against the English on the frontiers of Normandy and Gascony accomplished the same end as the cruel repression

of the Peasants' Revolt in the centre, or the sackings and plunderings of the Captains of Adventure round Rheims, round Orleans, and on the borders of Provence. I have dismissed many tragedies in a single phrase; but how in a few lines shall I indicate the terrible position of the peasants? Their grandfathers had dwelt in little hamlets almost under shelter of the town, to whose palisaded suburbs every winter they, with their families, their harvest and their furniture, thronged for asylum. Moreover, in that earlier age, ruled by firm principles still confidently trusted, the peasant was little less sacred than the priest. All classes recognized the holiness, the authority, of him who sows and reaps the grain that is the life of all. No usurer might take in pledge the ploughshare, the beasts that draw it, nor the corn as yet unthrashed. Four days a week, in war time as in peace time, from every Wednesday night till Monday at sunrise, the *Truce of God* forbade the men-at-arms to traverse field or sheep-walk; moreover, at any time the peasant, threatened by marauders, was safe if he fled to his plough and laid his hand upon it; the man who touched the iron that furrowed the earth was inviolable, and the plough was as sure a sanctuary as the church.* But in the thirteenth century the rural populations, overcrowded round their district towns, pushed further and yet further out into the outlying area of moor and forest, till their clearings, far afield, were beyond reach of their earlier centre. In their new home they clustered all year long round the church which they had raised, under protection of the nearest manor. And the years of peace continued and the population swelled. Thus from each *Châtellerie* sprang new off-shoots; distant hamlets that had forgotten the necessity of a sword-arm to shelter them, paying tribute to their feudal lord, but too far from his fortress to receive any efficient

* See D. Bessin, *Concilia*, part i., p. 78, quoted by Delisle, p. 116.

aid in wartime. When the great English war broke out and the long years of invasion, these peasants learned to feel their loneliness. True, their neighbours round the manor-house were little better off; for after Crecy, and after Poictiers, the greater part of the Seigneurs of France were either dead or in the hands of the English. The ransom they had to raise was all their tenants knew of them; bitter songs and proverbs began to fly from mouth to mouth. "Ten of our Seigneurs will cry surrender to the sound of an Englishman's voice a mile away!" cried Hodge, indignant. Poor Hodge, other miseries were in store for him! The Great Plague, which had emptied the country after Crecy ("la tierce partie du monde mourust"), came again, following Poictiers. When at last the epidemic passed away (having doubled the rate of wage in less than ten years), when the farmer prepared himself to face new economic conditions, he found himself confronted with new dangers. The truce that had followed Poictiers had brought indeed a momentary peace, so that hope began to flourish with the primroses. But the peace that came in the wake of the battles of the fourteenth century was crueller than battle. . . . The engagements were no longer fought solely by the armed chivalry of a kingdom; the system of regular armies was as yet unknown. In this bitter time of transition, war was chiefly made by mercenary Captains, who led their troops of adventurers in the pay of the highest bidder.

When the war was over, the men who had fought in it could not vanish into air. The nobles rode home to their castles, the peasants to their farms; but the bulk of the army, these bands of mercenaries, remained hovering with the vultures round the battlefield of yesterday. They were hungry and must eat; they must find a lodging somewhere; and their habit was to plunder. So east and west, north and

south, the Companies went, riding as to a tourney; but chiefly they made their way to the rich unravaged Centre; there they soon took thirteen towns, with many fortresses and castles. . . . Readers who remember the terrible chapters in which Froissart describes the depredations of the Captains of Adventure throughout the centre of France, and down through Gascony to Provence, must very often have dissented from my cheerful picture of the life of fourteenth-century villagers. They remember the despair of the Jacques of Brie, and their extermination; they count up the villages marked in some Royal ordnance as having disappeared; they recall the ballads of Eustache Deschamps describing the sack of Vertus, and think how many a flourishing little town and what innumerable hamlets shared its fate:

"If you wish to see poverty, a ruined country-side, a deserted town, tottering walls where the fire has been, miserable homes, and a more miserable population—go to Vertus! The English have left everything in flames. There you can have at your good pleasure a horse all skin and bone, a broken bed with foul sheets, and, when you take your walks abroad, the amusement of the ruined housetops tumbling round your ears.

"Henceforth the farms round Vertus shall be abandoned; the vineyards are neglected and no man tends the plants. This first year after the sack there will be few wages paid and those uncertain. The man who was wont to speak loud will learn to speak low. Our town exists no more, and 'twill be long before her walls are built again." *

All this is true; and we shall never know in how many villages the sleeping peasants awoke one night to the dreaded tramp of armed horsemen, to the blare of trump and fife, to

* Eustache Deschamps, *Ballades*, édition du Marquis de Queux de St. Hilaire. Ballade 835.

the sheen of moonlit armour, and the presence of the redoubtable Company in their midst. . . . Bretons axe in hand, Gascons armed with lances, the Genoese crossbow-men, the English with their bows and arrows, the Lombards with their knives; they were all as well known as the French—all prayed against and watched for throughout the land of France. The sharpest-sighted villager would stand for days in the steeple on the look-out, in order to alarm his fellows when the first of the horsemen should ride up from the horizon. In a moment, women, children, men, would throng to the appointed hiding-place in the brake, bringing with them such treasure as still was left unburied. Happy those who could thus escape in time, and for whom no crueller fate was in store than to find on the morrow a heap of red ashes where once their village stood!

Yet, how shall we believe it? Though all this was true, the countrysides retained their astonishing vitality. Although in many districts most of the young men went off to the wars ("Nous aymons mieux faire le gallin-gallant que labourer sans rien avoir," as Gerson heard them say), with a natural preference for plundering over being plundered, yet they only pushed a little further the work begun by the Great Plague. The wages of the few remaining labourers became so high that it was easy for them to recover in a little while more than their old well-being. True, the wattled cottage was razed to the ground, but the paved yard remained. The peasant knew that his treasure was safe in the keeping of some man of trust—some merchant of the walled city—when it was not buried in a box or a glove some three feet to the west of the wild cherry-tree, far enough from home to remain unsuspected by the Company. If most of the harvest was destroyed, the remainder sold for an extravagant price; and the hunger of the poor in town was at least the farmers'

gain.* Then Charles V., the unparalleled king, sent off the Companies to Spain, to Lombardy, well out of the way. In 1375 our good Master Eustache takes heart and makes an ironical ballad, in which the Companies are supposed to lament the prosperity and good order of the kingdom.

"Le plat pays s'en sent déjà bien
Car on n'y ose piller rien ;
. . . .
Nul n'y va courrer sur les champs,
Ne n'y rançonne par puissance.
L'on n'y prend chevaux ni juments
Linges, draps, robes, ni finance,
Poulaille, moutons . . . violence
Ne s'y fait . . .
. . . et le commun bien
Y règne en grande autorité.
On fait labours en abondance.
Honorés sont les anciens . . .
*Chacun dist quz c'est grand pitié.*" †

So the wars ended.

But the rate of wage remained fairly high throughout all the fifteenth century. The peasants ate more and of better food, drank more freely of wine and cider (a good deal too freely, and they have not lost the habit), wore more costly and more comfortable garments, afforded their wives and daughters richer ornaments and trinkets than, in the same rank and class, they can afford to-day. In all times, in France, the poorest have contrived to hoard ; mediæval accounts and registers reveal the amount of saving effected by all classes, and record the lands and herds constantly acquired by farm labourers and domestic servants. They and their kind prospered, laid by their savings, and bought, rood by rood, the lands of the diminished noble, whom the long wars had

* In the disastrous years immediately preceding the accession of Charles V., the price of corn doubled.

† Eustache Deschamps, ii.

left penniless and threadbare. The lords were glad to sell here a croft and there a spinny, for in very many cases they could no longer afford to work their immense estates. And thus the rise in the rate of wages, brought about by battle and plague, not only retrieved the ravage of the English wars, but even prepared insidiously the final ruin of the Feudal system.

# THE MEDIÆVAL COUNTRY-HOUSE

# THE MEDIÆVAL COUNTRY-HOUSE

*Solos aio bene vivere, quorum*
*Conspicitur nitidis fundata pecunia villis.*
HORACE, *Epistolæ.*

## I

ONE of my friends, by race a Persian, a native of the Russian Caucasus, was used to come and see me on his home-sick days, to talk about the castle he had left at home. It is a great, strong castle, with stone towers and wooden balconies, and a vast hall within where my lord sits in state by the cavernous hearth and listens to the wandering minstrels, who sing long ballads to their instruments. Not only singers come there, but itinerant pedlars, the acrobats of the fair, pilgrims to some distant shrine, travellers of many sorts who bring to this high-perched castle news of the outer world. If my lord Aga should wish to see that world at closer quarters, in the nearest city he has his "hostel" in some wealthy burgher's house, and thither sometimes he repairs during the dead weeks of the winter. But with the first bud or sprout on the topmost sprig, he is back in the castle. For now the real life of the noble begins—the season of the chase! My lord is more or less of a scholar, and in the winter time he fingers amorously his rare collection of illuminated manuscripts (we possess one, for which his nephew offers us a village in Karabag!), brought together

at an infinite expense and trouble. But how far he prefers the summer morning, when, hawk in hand, the noble hunters troop forth on their gay-caparisoned horses to chase eagle or heron on the mountain heights! Deep down in the dungeon underground perchance some penitent wonders if the spring will ever come—for there are dungeons still in the castles of Karabag, though the lords there have no longer the right of life and death. Here the nobles live a merry life, united among themselves and seeing few who are not of their order, save the Emperor's hated tax-collector or the Jew doctor who comes upon his rounds, a quantity of little powders sewn into the sash about his waist. . . . Could we but be spirited to Karabag, we should find the Middle Ages there in flesh and blood, alive!

Who knows? Yet we who wish to visit the mediæval country-house, we will take a humbler way. We will mount pillion behind some solid, clerkly person: Maistre Jehan Froissart or Maistre Eustache Deschamps, sure of his road and garrulous about his masters. Thus we will jog along, gossiping, from place to place, alighting here and there at some stately castle, where the lord, like that Count of Foix who sent for Froissart from his inn—"est le seigneur du monde qui plus volontiers voit estrangers pour ouyr nouvelles;" or we will turn in at some pleasant manor, such as that Manor of Cachant, dear to Master Eustace, where there are gardens sweet with rose, gladiolus, and mint—where there are meadows, vineyards, and "a noble willow-wood," with baths of all kinds to refresh the weary traveller: "bains et estuves et le ruissel courant."

If the countryside afford a good granite rock surmounting a hill or mound of any height, that situation has generally been chosen for the castle, encircled by its protecting precipice. But in some parts of Northern France such sites

are few; and, contrasted with the German or Italian fortress on the hill, we find more frequently the manor "emmy estangs," so often sung of old poets—the castle built like Rochester, or Melun, on the brink or island of a river, isolated by moats and defended by encircling towers. Such was, for example, the Castle of Bièvre, commended by Deschamps in his 454th Ballad—

> "La place est forte et de noble cloison.
> Emmy l'estang où le donjon se lance
> Trois tours y a de pierre et de moellon."

Each tower is three stories high, and each stands well in advance of the castle wall, the entry defended by a "puissant pont-levis." By the fourteenth century, the castles were no longer built with a sole view to refuge and defence; the nobles no longer dwelt there as a last resort in war time, living in the guardroom with their garrison, and directing the defence amid the treasure. The castles of that time of transition were very habitable palaces; and Master Eustace passes from the military architecture to belaud the "noble aqueduct," which carried water into the interior of the castle, and to praise the rich device of the halls and chambers, the excellent *vivarium*, the well-stocked preserves of game, the baths, the gardens, the rowing-boats, the shady park. "'Tis," he finishes, "the pleasantest house I know—*pour demourer la nouvelle saison*."

This is not the strain in which a thirteenth-century minstrel would have sung the praise of Coucy—the castle has become a country-house. The great square tower, flanked with turrets at the angles, which has succeeded to the round tower of defence, is spacious enough for luxurious habitation. Every story contains a large hall, a moderate-sized room and a smaller one, beside the four cabinets in the corner turrets. Generally, the gallery, the chapel, the

dining-hall, and the lord's private room or "retrait" occupied the first story; above came my lady's chamber, her tiring-room, her oratory, and the "garde-robe," where her dresses lay folded in spice and lavender, and where her maidens sewed by day and slept by night. The upper stories were occupied by the children and by the guests; and the castle was crowned by several tiers of "machicoulis," or crenelated battlements, pierced by loopholes and communicating by a "chemin de ronde."

The ground floor was still dark and difficult of access, lighted only by a few rare lancet-windows, and given over to store-rooms, bath-rooms, ice-houses, and suchlike uses. It communicated, by means of trap-doors, with the cellars and dungeons underneath. Philippe de Vigneulles, in his chronicle, has left us an unforgettable account of his imprisonment, well on in the fifteenth century, in a dungeon of this kind. There were no kitchens within the house, for the cooking was done in a round high-roofed building, like a baptistry, in an outer court, near the servants' quarters; but sometimes the sick-chambers were situate on this dark, quiet, unfrequented ground floor, which preserved the tradition of its inaccessibility by the absence of any entrance on a level with the ground. A broad double flight of marble steps led from the court to the portal on the first floor. In any London suburb we still may see modest villas thus entered by a flight of steps raised above a high basement, which are, doubtless, quite unconscious of their direct descent from the keep of the twelfth century, entered only by a ladder reared against the front, or by knotted ropes let down from the first-floor window! By the 14th century, however, the *Perron* of the country-house was an object of great architectural dignity. It generally opened into a long gallery, or *loggia*, or verandah, occupying all one side of the

keep: a sort of first-floor cloister, with clustered ogival windows looking on the court below; in fact, the lineal descendant of the Gallo-Roman peristyle or diambulatorium. I believe that in America it is still common. Here the squires and dames used to loiter, "regardant bas en la cour les joueurs de paume jouer." Half the action of the novel of John of Saintré passes "ès galleries;" and no portion of the castle is more frequently cited by early poets. The Count of Foix received Master Jehan Froissart as he was walking after dinner in his gallery. In fact, the chief use of these *loggia*, *loges*, or *laube*, appears to have been as a promenade or loitering-place when it was too hot or too wet to meet in the orchard just beyond the walls. A very beautiful gallery of the Middle Ages is still preserved in the castle of Wartburg.

In the larger castles this gallery or *loggia* was sometimes distinct from the keep. Together with the great dining-hall ("sänger-saal" or "mandement"), where the lord sat in justice and received his guests, it formed a lower church-like building, in style much like an Oxford chapel, placed beside the keep and less strongly fortified. These separate halls were only used in time of peace. They were already well known in the thirteenth century, for in the palace of Percival—

> "La sale fu devant la tour
> Et les loges devant la sale."

And we read in the *Lai de Lautrec*—

> "Prochaines eurent leurs maisons
> Et leurs sales et leurs donjons."

But the sole square tower with its corner turrets remains, even in the fourteenth century, the type of the castle keep. The chateau of Vincennes, built by Charles V., is an admirable example of the kind.

## II

It was not easy to enter the castle keep. It stood encircled by a strongly fortified enclosure, isolated by moat or precipice, and defended, not only by outworks of palisading, but by a barbican and several smaller towers. Having run the gauntlet of all this, having passed down the narrow winding path between the palisades, the visitor arrived at the moat, and blew a horn hung there for the purpose. After parley with porter and watchman, the drawbridge was let down; and after further parley, perchance, the great gate may have swung back on its hinges. In this case, the stranger found himself in a long hollow archway, protected by a series of portcullises, with a perforated roof, through which boiling pitch, molten lead, Greek fire, or simple scalding water could be poured down from an upper chamber. In time of peace, however, the visitor passed unscathed through the gate into a vast courtyard enclosed by huge battlemented walls or towers; a courtyard that is almost a village, for it contains the church, the knights' quarters, the squires' house, the lodgings for pages and servants, the barracks, the cottages of the artisans and labourers on the estate, the bake-house, the kitchen, the walled and gated fish-pond, the fountain, the washing-place, the stables, the barns, etc. A second gate, a second portcullis, lead to a smaller court, where—huge, swart, and sombre—towers the keep. It is immense, it is impregnable, and always opposite to the weakest point of the defence, with a postern of its own leading to the orchard, and a subterranean way into the open country. Those who have admired the black majesty of Loches will admit the grandeur of the mediæval keep.

Built against the castle's outer wall, looking from its upper windows across the open country, the keep sometimes has pleasant views. An island castle, defended by a wide expanse of water, or lifted high above the plain upon a granite needle, could afford the luxury of light and air, could indulge in large windows, grouped three or four together in a space of dead wall, on which they make a lacework of pointed arch and separating columns. But the huge moated castle of the plain was less fortunate. The windows were rare, narrow, far apart. The walls, ten feet thick, made a deep and dark recess for the long lancet holes, more often closed with oiled and painted linen than with glass, and placed very high for the sake of safety. Sometimes they were as much as five feet above the floor. A few years ago in Florence, at the Palazzo Alessandri, I remember seeing windows of this sort, high-perched recesses, the size and shape of an opera-box, reached by a staircase cut in the stone of the wall. On the granite window-benches, heap embroidered cushions; lay a Saracen carpet on the floor; and set in this narrow shrine some fair young woman, lily-slender in her tight brocaded gown. She is playing chess with a squire still younger than herself. Or perhaps she is alone, singing to her lute some ballad of the Round Table—

"La reine chante doucement,
La voix accorde à l'estrument,
Les mains sont belles, li laiz bons,
Douce la voix et bas li tons."

## III

Even nobles of some pretensions used in their daily life little more than the great hall of justice (where the movable trestle-tables were brought in at dinner-time), the

gallery which answered to our modern drawing-room, the chapel, the chamber, and the garde-robe, where the young maids-of-honour learned to embroider amid their waiting-women.

These halls and chambers were furnished with some splendour. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the walls were no longer ornamented with the mere stencil-pattern in white and yellow ochre, which sufficed for the princely keep of Coucy. There is a frieze painted, with knights and goddesses, with "Vénus la Dieuesse d'Amour," or else adorned in fresco or mosaic by "generations of Christians and Saracens painted in battle," such as the Seigneur de Caumont admired on the walls of Mazières.* Lower down, the walls were often wainscotted like that—

"Rice sale à lambres
Et d'or musique painturée
Et de fin or tout listée"—

where Percival found the Damosel. If the walls were left bare, they were furnished just below the frieze with an iron rod, whence depended hangings of warm stuff or tapestry. Every castle possessed several sets for each apartment, and the noble on his travels had at least one set of chamber-hangings strapped among his baggage. Nothing was easier than to suspend these stuffs, already provided with their hooks, to the rod and rings prepared to hold them. "One thousand hooks for tapestry," is a common item in fourteenth-century accounts.†

The hangings were of plain serge, of worked silk cloth of gold, or "tapisserie de haute lisse," according to the wealth of the noble or the splendour of the occasion they adorned. In times of mourning the hangings were all black.

* *Voyage du Seigneur de Caumont*, quoted by Viollet-le-Duc, *op. ci.* t. v. p. 83.

† See, for instance, Douët d'Arcq, *Comptes de l'Hotel des Rois de France.*

Such a "chamber," consisting of wall-hangings, bed-furniture, chair-coverings, cushions, etc., in striped serge, with cord and fringe to match, was supplied to the Lady de la Trémoille in 1396, at a cost of fifty-nine livres—about £240 of our money. As the appearance of the hall could be changed at an hour's notice on the occasion of mourning or festivities, even the greatest castles had ordinary hangings for common use. King Charles V. possessed no less than sixty-four "chambers," or complete sets of hangings, in silk, velvet, cloth of silver, leather, embroidery, etc.* When Valentine Visconti, Duchess of Orleans, prepared to leave Paris in 1408, a few months before her death, a few months after her husband's murder, she caused her chamberlain to draw up a list of her furniture, which still exists in the Bibliothèque Nationale. This document (pathetically marked by faded crosses against the names of such objects as Valentine desired to carry with her to Touraine) enumerates more than sixty sets of hangings. In the embroidered curtains, some of the subjects appear astonishingly modern, and indicate a complete mastery of the human figure on the part of the designers. As few persons, I believe, have had the privilege of reading this unpublished manuscript (communicated to me by the late Comte Albert de Circourt) I proceed to quote a few of the more interesting descriptions :—

"2. Bed-furniture of green; the baldaquin is worked with a design of angels; the long curtain depending from the tester behind the pillows represents shepherds and shepherdesses feasting on cherries and walnuts; the counterpane shows a shepherd and a shepherdess within a park; the whole is embroidered with gold thread and with coloured wools. Item, wall-hangings to match. Item, curtains for the walls, without gold, and three smaller curtains of green serge.

* Labarte, *Mobilier de Charles V.*

"3. Item, a 'chamber'* in gold, silk, and wool, with a device of little children on a river bank, with birds flying overhead. There are three hangings to match, bed-furniture and sofa-cover. The counterpane is embroidered with a group of children, their heads meeting in the middle. Item, three other hangings, with a cherry-tree, and a dame and a squire gathering cherries in a basket—which go with the aforesaid chamber-hangings to make up (*pour fournir*).

"4. Item, another 'chamber,' of a brownish green, *sans* gold, with a lady holding a harp; and there are six hangings to match, with bed-furniture, and a quilt for the couch.

"17. Item, a great tapestry, with the history of the destruction of Troy the Great.

"Item, two wall hangings, with the victories of Theseus.

"Item, a green velvet cover for a couch, and a long cushion covered with green velvet, and two chair cushions, also of green velvet.

"19. Item, a white 'chamber,' sown with gladiolus; bed-furniture, quilt for couch, and four rugs.

"20. Item, a set of green tapestries de haute lisse, with the Fountain of Youth and several personages; with bed-hangings, counterpanes, sofa-covers, and six wall-hangings, all worked with gold, without guards (linen coverings or *housses*).

"Item, a 'chamber,' representing a lady playing with a knight at the game of chess.

"Item, a set of hangings of cloth of gold, including bed-curtains, counterpane, and two large cushions."

These tapestries must have been as marvellous as those exquisite rose-grey hangings which still adorn the upper

* The "chamber" generally consisted of bed-curtains, a baldaquin, counterpane and covering for the couch or sofa, hangings for the wall, doors, and windows, cushions for the benches and chairs.

gallery of the Musée Cluny. The smaller curtains were stretched over screens of wicker, or served to drape the great roofed and cushioned settle near the fire, while cloths of gold and silver curtained the throne-like faldestuil reserved for the master of the house. Mats of plaited rushes, not unlike our India matting, were laid in winter on the floors under the delicate rugs of wool, imitated from the industry of the East; but in summer a strew of fresh rushes, mint, and gladiolus (that flower so dear to mediæval eyes), covered the pavement with a cool fragrance, while a bough of some green tree or flowering bush filled the hearth.* Great soft cushions, "carreaux" or "couettes," were placed, sometimes on the chairs and benches, sometimes on the floor itself, according to their size. They served, like the tabourets of Saint Simon, for people of lesser dignity, seated on occasions of ceremony, in presence of their lord. There were also *bankers*, or stuffed backless benches (divans, as we should say), placed against the wall; *dossiers*, a sort of short sofa with a back and cushions; and armchairs provided with *pavillons*, or tester and curtains to keep off the draughts. There were always carpets in rich halls or chambers; long, narrow ones in front of the bankers and the settle, and larger thicker "tapis velus" in the middle of the room. Rugs of embroidered Hungarian leather, and skins of leopard or tiger were sometimes laid upon the hearth.†

* The Knight of La Tour makes a mock of certain eccentric "Gallois" who strew their floors and deck their hearths, in winter, "comme en esté," with herbs and holly.—p. 242.

† Labarte, *Mobilier de Charles V.*

## IV

All these cushions, curtains, carpets, did not suffice to keep the cold from the great deep halls of our forerunners. A shiver runs through the literature of the age.

"Telz froid y fait en yver que c'est raige!"

says Eustache Deschamps in his 805th Ballad, describing the Castle of Compiègne. Even in the house one must arm one's self with good furry hose, furred pourpoints, warm fur-lined cloaks and hoods. In winter, men and women alike wore a long tunic of fur, quilted between two pieces of stuff, underneath their outer garments. But to be slender was the ideal, the supreme elegance of the later Middle Ages. In vain the Knight of La Tour warns his daughters of the fate of sundry very comely maidens, who, wishing to appear in their true slimness before their lovers, discarded their furred tunics despite the blast of winter, and turned the young men's hearts against them by the chicken-flesh of their cheeks and the blueness of their noses! In vain he draws a salutary picture of lovers, at last united, dying of cold in the arms of one another, victims to the too chilly elegance of their figures! The furred tunic was all very well for gouty Master Eustace and the elderly knight: young beauties and trim gallants often preferred the risk of mortal illness, and let them grumble.

"Sy est cy bon exemple comment l'en ne se doit mie si lingement ne sy joliettement vestir, pour soy greslir et faire le beau corps en temps d'yver, que l'on en perde sa manière et sa couleur." *

"Do not be shaved," interrupts Master Eustace, who must

* *Le Livre du Chevalier de La Tour Landry.*

decidedly have been an ill-dressed, slovenly old poet, "neither have your hair cut, nor take a bath this bitter weather." The young people might reply that the *Roman de la Rose* prescribes the hot bath as a sovereign remedy against winter. The bath-room, with its warm pipes, its great wooden tubs, with the carved gilt garlands round them, its lounges for cooling, its little tables spread with a dainty supper, still preserved a *souvenir* of Roman luxury. People used to bathe in company, sometimes men and women together (as we still do at the sea-side), their heads beautifully dressed and adorned with flowers, their bodies hidden up to the neck in their great cask-like baths, where the water was often thickened with scented bran or strewn with a dust of salutary herbs.

"Quand viendroit la froide saison,"

sings Maistre Jehan de Meung—

"Quand l'air verroient forcenez
Et jeter pierres et tempestes
Que tuassent ès champs les bestes
Et grands fleuves prendre et glacer. . . .

"On feroient chaudes estuves
S'y pourroient tuit nuz demourer
Se baignant entr'eus ès cuves."

In a German poem, *Der nakte Bote* quoted by Herr Alwin Schulz, a messenger arrives at a distant castle, and proceeds, as was the custom, to strip and take a bath after his dusty journey before presenting himself before the lord of the castle. What was his surprise on opening the door of the bath-room to behold my lord, my lady, and all their olive-branches disporting themselves in steaming tubs! It was, they explained, the only way they could keep themselves from freezing.

Master Eustace prefers a warm chamber, "nattée sus et

jus," with all the windows shut, a fur-lined dressing-gown, a bowl of old Beaune:

"Le chaud civet et bonne espicerie."

Contest of youth and age! But which, Master Eustace, would be better for your gout?

## V

The hearth none the less was deep and ample. Sometimes several fireplaces, grouped together on a raised daïs, occupied all the upper end of the hall with their blazing hearths and shadowy overmantels. A magnificent example still exists at Bourges. In houses of less pretension the hall could boast but one chimney, but that at least was vast. A whole tree could be laid across the gigantic fire-dogs, whence the great blaze radiated warmth and light into the church-like frigidity of the hall. Those who know the Salle de Garde at Langeais, will remember its beautiful chimney-piece representing the Castle's own crenelated *chemin-de-ronde*, carved with mimic soldiers and stooping watchers, who lean over the battlements to look at the blaze below; few objects are more stately than the monumental fourteenth-century fireplace. If the heat did not penetrate very far, if the humbler fry in the lower hall were grateful for their furs—at least, under the huge overmantel, where the curtained settles stood, there was a cosy ingle-nook for the master of the house, his wife, his children, his guests, his chief retainers.

In such noble houses as could not boast a resident physician, or a master of requests, or a staff of notaries and secretaries, there was, at least, invariably, a chaplain. Immediately below that reverend clerk came the seneschal

who was constable, governor, or simple steward, according to the standing of the castle. When no separate dispenser was employed, the seneschal was dispenser, master of the household, and governor of the pages. Next to him came the butler; then, the chamberlain, to whom were entrusted the jewels, art treasures, and furniture of the castle; the marshal, or master of the horse, and the head falconer. All these were persons of importance, to be treated with a certain ceremony; they were frequently of noble blood; they accompanied their master on many of his journeys, and were rather his ministers than his servants. Next to them in order of rank stood the housekeeper or governess, often a beguine or Tertiary nun, who supervised the ordering of the house, engaged and controlled the servants, and governed the young girls of noble family serving in the castle as maids of honour. Under her came a swarm of chambermaids and housemaids, cooks and tailors, page-boys and varlets. Let us not forget from the list of our retainers that person of consideration, the fool: the ancestor of the modern diner-out. Fools and dwarfs were not to be found under every noble roof. The smaller country-houses were sometimes condemned to a distressing sanity, and depended for their amusement on wandering minstrels and the acrobats of the fair.

We have not counted in our list the knights and squires of the keep, nor yet the garrison with its captain, nor the artisans and labourers on the estate. For the moment we are occupied merely with the interior of the castle. And the chief thing that strikes us in it is the abundance of young people—the troops of boys and girls.

## VI

Every castle was, in fact, a school—a seminary of polite education. From the king to the pettiest baron, every noble received at his court the children of his principal vassals; and thus every noble child was educated to the standard of the sphere immediately above his own. In their homes, from the age of seven, boys and girls alike had learned to spell, to ride, to know that they were Christians. At the age of ten or twelve they were generally sent to court. Here they learned, above all, the duties and behaviour of gentlepeople.

Great care was taken that they should be well-bred, chivalrous, courteous, neatly clad, and clean. Along with this, the boys learned to fence, shoot, fight with sword and shield, joust, play quintaine, tennis, palm-play, chess, draughts, and tric-trac. They were taught to ride, climb, leap, swim, and to perform all these feats in heavy armour and handicapped by difficult conditions. In a word, they were trained to amuse themselves, to exert themselves, and to endure. The *Livre des Faiz de Jean Bouciquaut* shows the great stress laid upon physical education; but it also shows that physical education was not all. Boys who would grow into knights, and pass through many courts and countries, had to learn several languages. French, of a sort, was taught in all European countries—often, no doubt, it was of the kind of Stratford-atte-Bowe—for French then, as now, was the language of diplomacy and courts. And some lads then, as now, acquired a little Greek and Latin; but so much learning was rarely encouraged save in the future Churchman. All noble children, boys and girls, learned to read and write, though frequently in after-life the

warrior's remembrance of these arts was no more precise than the knowledge possessed by our average country squire of the *Iliad* he used to parse at school. The women kept up their accomplishments: most noble women in England and Italy, as in France, could read, play some musical instrument, embroider, speak a little French, bind a wound and tend a fever, if comparatively few could wield the pen.

At twelve years old the page was sent to court. Here he was to finish his education, to win, if possible, his suzerain's favour, and to lay the beginnings of his fortune. But at first he saw little of his lord. He was entirely under the control of the seneschal, the chamberlain, and the first equerry, for, as the name denotes, the young squire's quarters were situate in the *écuries*. After a few years' apprenticeship his opportunity might come. A chance might make him a page-messenger, and so he might earn the confidence of his Seigneur. He might, by his good manners and courtesy, awaken the attention of some noble dame. He might even accompany his suzerain to some superior court, attract the notice of the over-lord, and be adopted to that higher sphere. Thus the little Jehan de Saintré, a young lad in the household of his father's suzerain in Touraine, was taken by that gallant knight to Paris, where the king took a fancy to the child—"tellement que il le voulut avoir en sa cour à estre son paige, pour après lui chevaucher, et au sourplus servir en salle, comme ses aultres paiges et enffans d'honneur." But the natural course of things was for the lad to remain a page among his fellow-pages till the age of fifteen or sixteen, when he was ripe for the office of messenger or carver at the lord's table. These offices entailed squireship. In this condition he remained until about the age of twenty,

when, generally on the occasion of some princely wedding, some outbreak of war, some tournament or other great occasion, he was dubbed knight, and set forth on his adventures.

While all these lads from twelve to twenty were fencing, riding, or playing palm-play in the court, their sisters were employed in my lady's company. They seldom came together with the men of the castle, save on holidays and feast-days. At other times they spent their time in my lady's chamber or tiring-room, or walked with her in the country, for it was held unseemly that ladies of noble birth should be met walking alone. They were, in fact, much in the position of "girls still in the schoolroom" in a modern country-house. They learned their lessons with their governess, practised their lute, went to church every morning, embroidered chasubles and altar-cloths, and worked wonderful hangings for the cold stone walls. And there were from seventy to a hundred yards of needlework in a set of hangings! They could also spin fine silk and linen, and ornament with needlework their feast-day veils and dresses. (The less interesting forms of sewing were left to the army of tire-women and waiting-women who attended on the noble maidens and their lady.) They all knew how to ride and how to fly a hawk, to make wreaths and posies, to sing, to play, to beguile the long hours with chess, tric-trac, draughts; and the youngest of them began to deal and shuffle the new-invented "naypes," or "naibi"—the first playing-cards. They could pluck or brew virtuous simples, bind a broken limb, or nurse a fever. They could amuse the convalescent with endless tales of the Round Table, with the legends of Charlemagne, and with lives of the saints no less interesting and romantic. Most of them could read aloud some novel: *Cléomadès* or *Mélusine*. They must, I think,

have been blithe, charming, capable companions in the long winter of a lonely country-house. On the whole, with its constant undercurrent of chivalry and religion, theirs was an education which left its women delightful, tender of heart, and generous, if, perhaps, with little moral strength to resist the illusions of the heart.

## VII

From December till the end of March, life in the castle was perforce an idle one. War was rarely made in winter; there were no tourneys in the bitter weather, too cold for combatant or spectator; and in heavy snow time there was perforce a truce to hunting of the more vigorous kind. It would have been extravagant to rise before candlelight, so that it was after seven when knights and ladies left their curtained beds, washed their hands and face in rose-water, heard the Mass, and took their morning broth. Dinner, which in the summer was sometimes as early as nine, was sometimes in winter put as late as noon. And after dinner there was the siesta—the apparently inevitable siesta, sensible enough in summer heats after a morning already seven or eight hours old, but inexplicable during the best part of a winter's day. Still, in all the novels and chronicles of the fourteenth century, I am bound to admit that, at all seasons of the year, after the principal meal, both men and women retire to sleep for at least a couple of hours. It is true the meal was long and heavy, and highly spiced. Still, in our visions of mediæval heroes we cannot imagine Charlemagne nodding after dinner every day, despite the assurance of Philippe Mouskes "that he always undressed himself and slept for two hours after the midday meal, holding the

practice for a very wholesome one."* We do not evoke Knight Percival and his companions as sleeping half the afternoon away. Yet—

"après le disner
Se couchièrent . . . à dormir
Jusqu'al vespre sans nul espir.
* * * *
Endroit vespre sont reveillé
Le souper ont appareillié." †

Joinville mentions, as the most natural thing in the world, that St. Louis went to bed every day after the midday dinner until vespers; while the child Jehan de Saintré, Damp Abbez, the Dame des Belles Cousines, Pero Niño, the Dame de Sérifontaines, the Lady of Fayel, the Chastelain de Coucy, all the brood of fourteenth-century heroes and heroines, follow, in this respect, the example of their elders.

Towards three o'clock, our dames and knights aroused themselves, took a slender meal of bread dipped in wine or hypocras, and preserved fruits, and then set out to vespers. We still are faithful to the afternoon-tea, but we have dropped the daily church service. After vespers the winter evening had closed in—the fourteenth-century evening ill-lit by flaring torches. It was fortunate if pedlar or pilgrim, minstrel or acrobat, knocked at the castle gate and demanded hospitality. Otherwise, despite the well-worn *facetiæ* of Master Hausselicoq, the fool, the evening was apt to prove a trifle long.

The accounts of fourteenth-century barons abound in mention of minstrels, acrobats, "joueurs d'espertise," "joueurs de la corde," "chanteurs et chanteresses," and all the motley

* "Après mengier al miédi, et lors tout nuz il se couçoit, dormir deux heures, puis levoit" (Philippe Mouskes: *Chronique*).

† Quoted by Herr Alwin Schultz, *op. cit.*, i. 362.

crew.* Every castle was glad to extend its hospitality to wayfarers of every kind, for they brought news and amusement, and renewed the worn-out stock of gossip. Two little pictures of people of this sort occur to me as I am writing. One is a sketch of the Welsh or Breton harper, from the poem of Renart. When Renart, disguised as a jongleur, offered to sing to Isengrin his lays of the Round Table, he put on a strange jargon, and proceeded to tell his story in almost unintelligible French—

> "'Je fot saver bon lai Breton
> Et di Merlin et di Foucon
> Del Roi Artus, et de Tristan
> Del Chievrefoil, et Saint Brandan.' . . .
> 'Et sais-tu le Lai Dan Iset?' . . .
> 'Ya-ia!' dit il. 'Godistouët!'" (God is to wit?)

Wrapped in their weather-beaten mantle, shaggy, ridiculous, singing much as sings Hans Breitmann to-day, it is thus (according to M. Joseph Bédier†) that we must picture the minstrels who sang of Tristan and Yseult. Probably they used their strange, absurd prose merely as a medium to explain the story to their hearers in much such a *chante-fable* as "Aucassin et Nicolette," while they sang their lyrics in their Celtic tongue to the music of their harps. And if the voice is sweet, after all, the language is of little consequence.

Our other tiny idyl is drawn from the arrival of the pedlar at the castle of the Lady of Fayel. That hapless and guilty lady, desirous at all risks to meet her noble lover, bids the Chastelain de Coucy don the pedlar's garb in order to approach her. He puts on rough laced boots and a coat of coarse cloth, on his head a torn and battered hat, a stick

* See, for instance, the *Comptes de la Trémoille* and the *Comptes de l'Hotel des Rois*.

† "Les Lais de France," par J. Bédier: *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Oct. 15, 1891.

in his hand, a pack upon his back. He comes to the castle and undoes his wares :

"car mercier
Porte en tous lieus son panier
Et en salles et en maisons
S'ebate en toutes saisons."

The lady and her maidens stand round and pick and choose, praise this, bargain for that, choose and discard in true feminine fashion.

"Ont maintes choses barguigné
Et li aucuns ont acheté
Ce que leur vint à volonté."

But when the pack is strapped again, the pedlar murmurs that it is late. "And it rains!" cries the Dame de Fayel. So the packman stays all night at the castle, and my lady finds means to get speech with her lover.

In the summer, when there were tourneys and weddings and other festivities in the countryside, not only packmen passed and minstrels, but acrobats, conjurers who swallowed knives and lighted candles, keepers of learned pigs and clever dogs, owners of puppet-shows, dancers and jongleurs in plenty. They travelled from place to place, lodging in the castle or the village inn, always welcome guests in the monotony of country life. But all these visitors were rarer birds in winter. Then the long days were passed in chess-playing and tric-trac ; heavy bets were laid and taken, and in the cumber of their idleness many a knight was ruined out of sheer *ennui*.

Gambling was the curse of the noble, as it has always been the curse of every class trained to win and to desire, but with scant outlets for its energies. The knights in winter gambled pretty nearly all day long. We remember how the Servitor of Milun, entering a castle in the morning,

finds in the great hall two knights playing chess, so absorbed that they do not see him. . . . "When Easter comes," say the knights to Milun, "we will recommence our tournaments," but until Easter there is no rival to their games of chance, except the eternal game of love. Chess was the baccarat, the bridge of the Middle Ages. In vain the king forbade it in 1369, in 1393, and both before and after, with every other game of hazard. But who was to enter the snowed-up country castle, to tell tales of knights and ladies playing the forbidden game? The women were almost as bad as the men. "Never play chess, save for love," says the Knight de la Tour to his daughters: "ne soyez jamais grant jouaresses de tables." And he proceeds to tell them melancholy tales of land, of money, and of women's honour spent over the too enticing board. But, alas, good knight, the days are ill to pass in winter time!

## VIII

So there was great joy when the trees began to redden:

> "Betweene Mersh and Averil
> When spray beginth to spring."

The poets of the Middle Ages, all intoxicate with May-dew, did but express the hearts of their whole generation. The long dull months, shut in cold and ill-lit draughty houses, with, for nourishment, the same eternal salt meat and ship-board food, were now delightfully over-past. The voice of the stock-dove was heard in the land, and the almond-boughs began to blossom in the orchard. Spring meant a free life out of doors in the sunlight; spring meant the hunt, delicious days spent in the fresh green wood in

healthy sport that made the pulses beat. Spring meant the game-bag full; a varied table spread in bower or garden. Spring meant a hundred little intimate festivities waking to mirth the numerous young people of every fourteenth-century castle. Sometimes the whole company go out to hunt for several days in the forest, knights and ladies, pages, maidens, carrying with them tents, provisions. The girls wash their hands and faces in the dew of flowers to get a good complexion, as they still used to do in Warwickshire when I was a little child. Every hunter has a horn to sound if he gets lost in the forest. How they laugh over all the little hardships and adventures of the picnic! In one old poem—old even in the days of Valentine Visconti—the knights have forgotten their towels and have to dry their faces on the ladies' skirts.*

Generally these great hunts were made with hounds, and the game was deer or bear, wild boar, hare, or otter. But the most fashionable sport was hawking. Every castle had its knight-falconer, who was a great person with onerous duties. The royal falconer was paid as much as twenty-four sols a day—three times the daily due of the physician; and even a varlet falconer was given three sols *per diem*—a very respectable salary.† But he was not paid for doing nothing; the hawk was hard to catch, and when caught difficult to train. Night and day the falconer, with the bird, hooded and fasting, on his hand, must pace up and down, up and down, like a mother with her teething child. When at last the bird was fit for use, perched lightly on his lady's wrist, or soaring after swan, pheasant, or wild duck through the upper air, he was one of the most precious and beautiful possessions of a noble. The best esteemed was the Irish or

* Guillaume de Dole. Quoted by Herr Alwin Schultz, t. i. p. 470.

† Douët d'Arcq, *Comptes de l'Hotel du Roy Charles V.*

Norwegian ger-falcon. What pet name was more endearing than that of "Gay Goshawk"? His clear eye, a pure grey, neither greenish nor bluish, is the inevitable standard to which the mediæval lover compares his lady's glance—falcon-keen, falcon-swift, falcon-bright, and grey as the hawk's eye. In the evening, invigorated rather than fatigued by the long day in the forest, knights and ladies would fall to dancing. The country neighbours would come for miles; even the burghers of the richest sort were now and then invited. "Il est accoustumé en esté de veiller à dances jusqu'au jour," writes the Knight of La Tour, but he condemns the practice, being past his youth, and asserts that strange things happen when some band of practical jokers contrives to extinguish all the lights. Let us hope that such accidents did not frequently occur, and that the knight's three daughters were not kept at home too often "pour le péril de mauvaises langues."

## IX

It would be pleasant to spend a day or two in some fourteenth-century country-house during the early summer. Let us attach ourselves to the suite of a certain Spanish hidalgo, Don Pero Niño, a noble adventurer, who, landing at Harfleur in 1405, went to visit Renaud de Trie, Admiral of France, at his country seat of Sérifontaines. Don Pero Niño, fresh as we to France, sets forth, by means of his gifted secretary and chronicler, all the details of that memorable visit. We remember no page in Froissart at once so bright and so precise.

The Admiral de Trie was an aged knight, ill in health. In his day he had been a famous fighter, but in 1405,

broken down by many battles, he lived retired on his estate in Normandy.*

"There dwelt he in great comfort in a castle, strong, although situate in a plain, and furnished as well as it had been in Paris. He had about him young gentlemen in page-ship, and all kind of servitors, as befits so great a lord.

"In his house there was a great chapel, where Mass was said every morning to the sound of trumpets and divers instruments, played by his minstrels in a way that was a marvel. Before the house a river flowed; orchards and gracious gardens bordered it. On the other side of the castle was a pond for fish, enclosed by walls, and guarded by gates well-locked; whence, every day, the steward might furnish food for three hundred persons. . . . There was a pack of fifty hounds; twenty horses were kept for the service of the lord of the castle. There were plenty of falcons-gentle. There was all that heart can wish for in the way of hunting—the otter, the roe, the wild boar, small game, or waterfowl."

The old knight had a young wife, "the fairest lady that was at that time in France." She was a woman of great sense and order, and, as was in those days the custom, she was almost entirely responsible for the management of her husband's estates.

"All things were arranged or decided by my lady. She alone governed everything both within and without. My lord the Admiral was a rich man, lord of many lands; but he had to take thought for none of these things, my lady being sufficient unto all."

* Le Victorial, *Chronique de Don Pedro Niño, Comte de Buelna*, par Gutierre Diaz de Gomez, son Alferez, 1379–1449. Traduit de l'Espagnol d'après le manuscrit, avec une introduction et des notes, par le Comte Albert de Circourt et le Comte de Puymaigre.

"My lady had her noble lodging apart from the mansion of her lord. They dwelt within the self-same moat, but divided the one from the other by a drawbridge. It would be long to set forth the number and the magnificence of the furniture that there was in this lodging. Here lived my lady, surrounded by ten maids of honour, very richly clad and accoutred all of them, who had nought to do save keep their lady company, for beneath them there were many waiting-women.

"Now will I tell you the rule and order of my lady's life. Of a morning, so soon as she was dressed, forth she went with her damsels to a spring hard by, where each one told her rosary, and read her book of *Hours* in silent prayer, sitting a little apart from her fellows. Next, plucking flowers and violets upon their way, they hied them home to the palace, and gathered in the chapel, where they heard a low Mass. As they came out of church their servants handed them a silver tray, furnished with larks, chickens, and other roast fowl, of which they took or left what they would, and drank a little wine. My lady ate but rarely of a morning, or trifled with some morsel to humour those about her. Their fast broken, lady and damsels mounted their noble hackneys, and then, met in company with such knights and squires as were of their party, they went riding through the lanes and open country for some while, weaving garlands of flowers as they went. Then might you hear such singing, by voices well-tuned and timed together, of virelays, lays, rondeaux, songs, complaints, ballads, and other verses, such as the French know featly how to finish, that, I declare you, could it last for ever, you would have thought yourself in Paradise."

With this company rode the Captain Pero Niño, the occasion of all this festival. With them at dinner-time he

rode home to the castle, dismounted, and strode into the hall, where the portable trestle-tables had been already spread. The Admiral could no longer ride afield, but he welcomed home his guests with a marvellous good grace. My lady and Pero Niño were placed at the Admiral's table, while the seneschal presided over the other, and saw that every damsel sat between a squire and a knight. There were meats of all manner in great number and marvellous well cooked. During the meal whosoever knew how to speak with courtesy and measure of arms and love was sure to find a hearing and an answer. Meanwhile the jongleurs made low music on divers instruments. Dinner over, grace was said, the tables removed, and then the minstrels came; my lady danced with Pero Niño, and every damsel with her squire. This dance lasted an hour; when it was over, my lady gave the kiss of peace to Pero Niño, and every lady to her cavalier. Then wine and spices were handed round, and all alike dispersed to their siesta. Pero Niño, happy knight, had his lodging in my lady's tower.

Later in the afternoon the horses were brought round, and the pages stood ready bearing falcons: a huntsman had already tracked the heron's course:

"Then would you have seen a noble sport and fair amusement, with swimming of hounds, beating of drums, whirring and wheeling of falcons, with knights and ladies riding along the river-bank as many as you can imagine them. That sport ended, my lady and her company would seat themselves to rest in some green meadow, while the pages unpacked cold fowl and game, and divers fruit. All eat and drank, twining garlands. Then, singing glees and songs, they returned to the castle."

Supper came at nightfall if it were winter-time. In summer the meal was earlier, and afterwards my lady would

set off on foot to wander up and down the countryside till dark, while some would accompany her, and some would stay to play at bowls. Then the torches flared in the great hall, the minstrels gathered in, and there was dancing until far into the night. And this is the order which was followed every day, according to the seasons and the quality of the guests, whenever there was holiday at Sérifontaines. But now, 'tis late. Hand round the wine and spices, and to bed!

## X

During these long days, when my lady danced, sang, and rode with Pero Niño, she and he discovered that the Admiral was old. "En tout honneur," they fell in love with one another. Like the woman of order that she was, instead of keeping Pero Niño as her lover, Madame de Trie sent him to her father to see if he would do for her second husband, while she stayed at Sérifontaines and nursed the Admiral. The father apparently consented, for we hear that they "se tinrent pour amoureux." Meanwhile the Admiral died. My lady and Don Pero exchanged keepsakes, and he promised to return to France and marry her at the expiry of her mourning. But having met in Spain a certain Doña Beátriz, he married her instead; and perhaps in later years Madame de Trie thought more kindly of the good old Admiral.

Neither the knights nor the ladies of these old chronicles surprise us by the delicacy of their heart. With the *Roman de la Rose*, the still unpurified passions of those ages held that—

> "Nous sommes faiz, beau filz, sans doutes,
> Toutes pour tous et tous pour toutes."

Adultery is as common in their chronicles as it has always been in fiction—and perhaps in fact. And when the lovers are tired of each other, it is difficult to veil the case less kindly than the Dame des Belles-Cousines, in her behaviour to Jehan de Saintré, or the Chastelain de Coucy when he punishes the Lady of Vermandois. Moreover, the very first beginnings of love were contaminated by a thought of utility, of "subsidy," as one of our authors does not fear to state. Even in that pure and charming chronicle, the *Livre des Faiz de Jehan Bouciquaut*, we read that on account of her influence and her prestige, "it is much better to love a lady of a station superior to one's own." Listen to the counsels which a lady of great position, the Dame des Belles-Cousines, gives to Jehan de Saintré! The lad, a child of thirteen, has refused to tell her the name of his sweetheart:

"The tears came into the lad's eyes, for never in his days had he given thought to such a thing as love or lady-loves. His heart fell, his face turned pale. . . . He sat a long while in silence, twirling the loose end of his girdle round his thumbs. . . . At last he cried out in his despair, for all the maids of honour fell to questioning him together and at once: 'What can I tell her? I have no lady-love! If I had one, I would tell you soon enough!'

"'Well, whom do you love the best of all in the world?' asked the maidens.

"'My mother,' said little Saintré, 'and after her my sister Jacqueline.'

"Then said my lady:

"'But of them that are nothing to ye, which love ye the best?'

"'I love none of them,' said Saintré.

"'What! none of them?' quoth my lady. 'Ha! false

gentleman! You love none of them? Then by that token I prophesy that you will come to nothing. Faint heart that ye are! whence sprang all noble enterprises, all great achievements and valorous deeds of Launcelot, of Gawain, of Tristan, of the courteous Giron, and the other knights of the Round Table? Also of Ponthus,* and innumerable other heroes? What else but love-service? What else but the desire to keep the favour of their much-desired dame? And I myself have known many men who, through their love affairs, have reached the highest possible honours, of whom, but for these, no more talk had been made than of so many simple soldiers.'"

Little Saintré left the lady's presence shamefaced, and when the door was shut, "he ran down the gallery as fast as if he had fifty wolves behind him." But one day, as he waited at table on the maids of honour, these ladies made him vow to give the promised answer that afternoon. Therefore, when the king and queen retired for their noonday siesta, my lady sought young Saintré in the gallery, and took him to her chamber with her; and there, surrounded by her ladies, she seated him at the foot of her couch and summoned him for a reply.

"At last the poor lad bethought him of one of the noble maidens sent to court, who was ten years of age.

"'My lady,' quoth he, 'tis Matheline de Courcy!'

"'Ah, coward!' cried my lady, 'to choose a child like Matheline. Not that she be not a very fair maiden, and of an excellent house, better than thine. But what good, what profit, what honour, what comfort, what advantage, *what subsidy*, what aid and counsel can you find in the love of Matheline? She is but a lassie yet. Nay, you

* *Les Amours de Ponthus et de la belle Sidonie* is the name of a once famous romance of chivalry.

should choose a lady of high and noble birth, wise, and *with the wherewithal to help your fortunes*, and set you above necessity; and her should you love with perfect service, loyally and well, and in all honour. Be sure that in the end she will have mercy upon you, "et par ainsy deviendrez homme de bien."'" *

When we think that this harangue (and especially all that follows it) was penned by an ecclesiastic for the education of a prince, we perceive that our code of morals has changed. Young Saintré received large sums of money from his mistress, with no loss of honour, and the lady herself enters on her mission as on a sacred calling. "Although so young, she had, in her virtue, formed a Roman resolution never to remarry; but often she wished that her work in the world might be to train some young knight or squire and make him a pattern of chivalry." It is with this high intention that she becomes the mistress of young Saintré; that she bestows her wealth upon him, and keeps him in due splendour of steed and apparel; that she preaches to him, with a sublime lack of logic, "how to flee the seven mortal sins"; that she finds him books to read, and stuffs him with quotation from Thales of Miletus, Chilon of Lacedemonia, Avicenna, Valerius Maximus, and Pittacus of Mitylene. To this end she persuades herself to a cruel separation, and sends him on his travels as knight-errant. She is, in fact, his mundane Beatrice. Her love for him is in truth a liberal education, and one that seems delightful and legitimate to her contemporaries. But our eyes see in her an ugly likeness to Madame de Warens, and we should say, in downright English, that she corrupts the lad.

* *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*, édition Guichard.

## XI

Virtuous or frail, the ladies of the Trecento, as of the two preceding centuries, were all alike as sisters in their loveliness. Or rather, we may say that only one type of beauty was recognized as such, all mediæval heroines were required to conform to that absolute standard.

In our eyes the dark-eyed beauties of Murillo, the warm blondes of Titian and Palma, the slender angels of Perugino, the powdered *espiègle* ladies of Gainsborough and Reynolds; the majestic form of the Venus of Milo, and the somewhat mannered elegance of Tanagra, are all, in their kind, types of accomplished beauty. Many different ideals have enlarged and exercised our taste. But, of all the candidates on our list, the Middle Ages would have admitted only the Perugino angel and the Tanagra statuette.

This lessens, at any rate, the difficulty of description. The mediæval beauty was *always* golden-haired, either naturally or by the aid of art. Her hair was very fine, rippling in long curves above a fair broad forehead. One of her distinctive charms was the large space between the brows, the "plaisant entr'euil" so often sung of early poets; very few things seemed more hideous to our forefathers than shaggy eyebrows meeting in the middle. It was also a great disadvantage for the eyebrows to be fair. They should be several shades darker than the hair, narrow, pencilled, delicately arched; Burns'—

> "Eyebrows of a darker hue
> Bewitchingly o'erarching."

Eyes, not blue, but "grey as glass," "plus vairs que cristal," not over-large, somewhat deeply set, and always bright, keen, and shining as a falcon's.

Below these brilliant eyes, a small straight nose, rather long than short, but above all "traitis"—that is to say, neat and straight—divided two oval cheeks, with dimples that appear at the bidding of a smile. A fresh, faint pink-and-white colour, like the first apple-blossom, must flourish in these little cheeks. The lips are much redder, slightly pursed over the tiny pearly teeth; "la bouche petite et grossette," says the prosaic *Roman de la Rose;* but Ulrich von Lichtenstein expressed his meaning better in his "kleinvelhitzerôter munt," his "little, very fire-red mouth;" or the author of *Guillaume le Faucon,* who likens his heroine's lips to a scarlet poppy-bud:

"Tant estoit vermeille et close."

Sometimes the small mouth was only half shut, as if about to speak:

"Les lèvres jointes en itel guise
C'un poi i lessa ouverture
Selonc réson et par mesure,"

says the author of *Narcisse.**

The cleft chin and the ears must be small and round and white, above a long neck, with a full white throat. The fairness of this throat, its delicacy and transparence, was the *sine quâ non* of feminine loveliness. "When she drank red wine, one saw the rosy fluid through her throat," say the poets.

The beauty of the Middle Ages was invariably slender, slim, and round as a willow-wand. The shoulders are small, the whole figure "greslette et alignie"; long-drawn out in slenderness, with slim, round, long limbs, and slim, round, long fingers, that show no joints, and terminate in trim, shining nails, cut very close. The bust is high, with neat, round, well-divided breasts, and a slim, round waist.

* Quoted from Herr Alwin Schultz, *op. cit.* t. i. p. 215.

When Eustache Deschamps, in his 960th Ballad, sings the charms of a lady quite correctly like this portrait, he ends with saying:

"Mais sur toutes portez bien vos habiz
Plus que nulle dame ne damoiselle
Qui soit vivante en terre n'en païs." *

Poets in every century have laid great store by that

"something i' the gait
Gars ony dress look weel."

The *Roman de la Rose*, that manual of the fourteenth century, devotes a score or so of verses to this doctrine of deportment.

"'Marche joliettement,' walk prettily, mincingly, showing your pretty little shoes, so well made they fit without a wrinkle. . . . And if your dress trail behind on the pavement, yet take thought to lift it a little towards the front, as if the wind had caught it, so that every one who passes you may notice the dainty well-shod slimness of your feet.

"And if you have a long mantle—one of those long, full cloaks that almost entirely hide your charming figure—with your two hands and your two arms manage to open it wide in front, whether the day be fair or foul, even as a peacock spreads his tail."

## XII

Let us not think that the fourteenth-century castle was entirely peopled by men and women in the bloom of idle youth. There were charitable widows whose conversation was in heaven; there were knights strong and resolute in their absolute religion. In spite of all its mediocrity,

* *Ballades d'Eustache Deschamps*, in five volumes. Edited by the Marquis de Queux de St. Hilaire.

alongside of its frivolity, its often criminal looseness of the marriage tie, the fourteenth century was an age of piety and honour. Every gentleman had two religions, for either of which he would have died; and the briefest record of life in the castle must find a place for the observances of the Church and the duties of chivalry. We cannot lay too great a stress upon the austerity, upon the charity, inherent in the ideal woman of a period whose great ladies were so often purely worldly and emotional. We should leave our readers under a false conception if we let them suppose that the women of a fourteenth-century castle were invariably after the pattern of the sprightly Dame des Belles-Cousines, or of the sweeter Lady of Fayel. "Even in a palace life can be lived well." No saint in her cloister was purer than Madame Olive de Belleville, "la plus courtoise dame et la plus humble;" stern to herself, fasting daily, wearing the hair-shirt on her tender flesh, but to all others most pitiful and gentle, visiting the sick, helping poor women in child-birth, praying on the graves of poor or aged people who had few to mourn them. And, by a rare virtue, she was charitable not only to the unhappy; she knew no less how to welcome and honour the well-to-do, the honourable, the unpathetic; she knew how to deck with fair, white raiment the smiling daughters of ruined gentle-folk, who else would have gone to their bridegrooms without a jewel or a wedding garment. She was hospitable, and even lavish, to the careless minstrel folk, so that they made a "Ballad of Regret" when at last she left them. Above all, she would never hear ill of anybody. And when the ugly story went round in whispers, and the worldly and the sceptical smiled half-content, this good woman, who denied herself the simplest pleasures, would hasten to excuse the sinner, to doubt if the tale were true; or, were it proven,

then she would say that God would amend it, and that His judgments and His mercy alike were marvellous, and would one day astound us all. So that in her neighbourhood none went undefended in the hour of slander, unsaluted in prosperity, unvisited in sickness or sorrow, unholpen in poverty, or unprayed for in the hour of death. Few sweeter eulogies could be given to any woman. "In truth," says the Knight of La Tour, "though I was only nine years old when I knew her, I still remember many a wise thing she said and did, that I would set down here had I the time and space."

Madame Olive de Belleville was as frequent a type as the Lady des Belles-Cousines and her kind. More frequent than either, and between the two extremes of saint and sinner, is the wise and prudent Lady of La Tour, the careful mother of growing daughters, "très gentille et preude femme," who, beautiful still, and often subject to temptation, is skilful as Portia or Beatrice in the witty answer, the brilliant, inviolable smile, which serves to turn aside the insinuation of evil. Nor let us forget that noble wife of a nobler husband, Madame Antoinette de Turenne, "who scarce lived in her husband's absence, with so great love did they love each other," who had refused the hand of a Royal prince in order to marry Sir John Bouciquaut. There were then, as now, in every class, countless women of purest honour, of staunchest virtue, wise in counsel, true of heart. And, in the highest rank, if the absence of daily cares produced many frail and thoughtless beauties, the same cause added to the souls of its saints a singular aloofness, a dazzling lustre of unworldliness, and a penetrating grace of meditation. The long empty hours of the mediæval donjon, if they fostered the loves of a Tristan and an Yseult, also brought forth many a radiant spiritual flower.

## XIII

In the castles of the fourteenth century, the men no less than the women were religious. The middle class, and especially the respectable bourgeois man of letters, affected a certain freedom of thought: he was already the father of Voltaire and the grandfather of the speech-making Jacobins of the French Revolution. But all that was changed among the nobility. There it was essential (even as it is among the nobles of France to-day), however light of life, to be grave of thought. The education of every knight made him instinctively religious. Even the scape-grace Louis of Orleans would pass weeks together in the Convent of the Celestines, praying, fasting with the monks before the altar. And a perfect knight was habitually not only pious, but austere.

The *Livre des Faiz de Messire Jehan Bouciquaut* gives us an admirable picture of a pattern of chivalry. The great Governor of Genoa (whom the documents of the Florentine archives reveal to us as an insupportable martinet, dogmatic, obstinate, and tyrannical, despite his virtues) appears in these pages in the inner splendour of a noble soul. Every morning he rose at dawn, "that the first-fruits of his day might be consecrate to God," and we learn with some surprise that this poet of courtly ballads, this soldier, this statesman, gave every morning of his life three consecutive hours to his "œuvre d'oraison," as infallibly renewed at night. At table, while his household were served in gold and silver, he ate and drank from pewter, glass, or wood; however rich the banquet, he partook but of one dish, the first served, with one glass of wine and water.

"He loves to read the fair books of God, the lives of

the saints, the deeds of the Romans, and ancient history; but he talks little and will listen to no slander. . . . Marvellously hateth he liars and flatterers, and driveth them from him. . . . Marvellously hateth he also all games of chance and fortune, and never consenteth to them. . . . Those virtues which be contrary to lubricity are steadfast in him. . . . He is stern and to the point in justice, yet faileth he not in mercy and compassion. . . . He is very piteous to the ancient men-at-arms who can no longer help themselves, who have been good blades in their time, but have laid by nothing, and so are sore distressed in their old age. . . . And with all his heart loveth he those who are of good life, fearing and serving our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . He oweth no debts. . . . He never lies; and all that he promiseth, so much doth he perform."

We are content to end our studies with the portrait of so true a knight.

THE END

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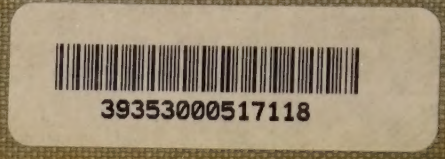
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